THE WAY IT WAS: FIFTY YEARS IN THE SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA BOOK TRADE

Louis Epstein

Interviewed by Joel Gardner

VOLUME I

Completed under the auspices
of the
Oral History Program
University of California
Los Angeles

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INTRODUCTION

The story of Louis Epstein is the history of Los Angeles portrayed through one of its most vital cultural institutions, the book trade. Of humble origins, ambitious and energetic, first centered in the small but bustling downtown then spreading, stretching, expanding, to Hollywood, the suburbs--so developed the city, so developed the book trade, and so developed the bookselling career of Louis Epstein.

When he first came to Los Angeles at the age of twenty-two, Louis Epstein had already traveled halfway around the world. Born in Kasheritz, in White Russia, December 8, 1901, he was raised by his mother, Sprische Sorkin Epstein, who cared for the family while her husband, Reuben Epstein, sought his fortune in the United States.

What his father found was employment as a presser in the garment industry of Cleveland. When Louis was seven, the family was sent for, and the Epsteins embarked on a journey of wagon, train, and ship. The elder Epstein soon expanded his trade to dealing in "seconds" from a pushcart; as his assistant, young Louis received his first exposure to the world of business.

A good student, Louis graduated from Cleveland's East Tech High School. He was enrolled in the law school at Ohio State University when a promising career was interrupted

by family problems and illness. When his sister and brother, tuberculars, moved to California, he left school, and the entire Epstein clan relocated in Los Angeles.

It was by chance--though perfectly logical, given his intellectual interests--that Louis Epstein entered the book business. To help with family finances, he became involved first in a produce business, then in a grocery store, the latter of which ended when he suffered an attack of pleurisy. While he was recuperating, he spotted a classified ad for a bookstore in Long Beach and set out on the Red Car the next day.

Thus began the first Louis Epstein's Book Store. The venture lasted only six months, for personal reasons--the discomfort of life in a Long Beach rooming house, the nature of the community--but his first exposure to the book trade had infected him forever. His next months were spent in booksellers' haunts, accumulating stock and learning values. In 1926, he found a spot on Sixth Street, the Book Row of young Los Angeles, and opened the Acadia Bookshop.

At Acadia, Epstein served his apprenticeship. He was taught by his neighbors--Ernest Dawson, for example--and his customers. He toured the bookshops of the city in quest of book wants, book bargains, book knowledge. By the time he sold Acadia to Ralph Howey in 1928, he was an aware bookman with an ease and familiarity with the ins and outs

of the business.

After a brief vacation spent book-buying up and down the Pacific Coast, he opened Louis Epstein's Bookshop at 518 West Eighth Street in the fall of 1928, a store that remained open for business until 1940, by which time Epstein had established his Hollywood beachhead. He owned two other bookstores in the interim: Argonaut Bookshop, opened for his brother Ben, which had a life span of twenty-five years (1933 to 1958); and Louis Epstein's Book Store of Long Beach, opened for Sam Reiser, who later owned his own shop in Hollywood.

Epstein met Ann Goldman through mutual friends when she was visiting the city from Washington, D.C. They were married in 1929 and had two sons, Aaron, born in 1930, and Eugene, born in 1934.

Until 1938, the story follows a pattern that might be common to any of a dozen or more booksellers, many of whom flourish today. But that year, because he had moved his family to Hollywood, Epstein decided to open a shop in that community. The step was a far greater one than he realized at the time; the Pickwick, his Hollywood bookstore, was to become as much a Hollywood landmark as Musso & Frank Restaurant and the Grauman's Chinese Theatre.

Pickwick was to become a landmark in more than just the geographical sense. With Edwin Stackhouse hired as

manager, Epstein began to branch out, first into trade books, then, guided by Stackhouse, into remainders. By 1940, Pickwick had achieved such success that the Epstein family closed the doors of Louis Epstein's Bookshop forever to center its concern on its Hollywood shop.

And it was a family operation, even as it expanded. Ann Epstein was always an integral part of all the Epstein enterprises, and when Aaron graduated from UCLA, he joined the staff of Pickwick as advertising manager. It was under Aaron's guidance that Pickwick pioneered cooperative newspaper advertising, in which the bookstore and the publisher shared costs of advertising space on the grounds that an ad sells a book in more than just the store that advertises it.

In 1964, Epstein was approached by Robert E. (Bob) Getz of the May Company, which was in the process of developing the ultramodern Topanga Plaza shopping center. What would Epstein think, asked Getz, about placing a Pickwick in that center? The answer didn't come easily; terms on cost and space required months of haggling. Nor did the step seem sure to all involved with Pickwick; some argued that the Valley store would draw Pickwick customers away from the main shop. But Epstein persevered, and the store was a smashing success. The May Company-Pickwick association flourished, branches spreading like a sycamore,

until the Pickwick chain became so profitable, so attractive, that it drew the attention of the Minneapolis-based retail chain, Dayton-Hudson. Offered cash and Dayton-Hudson stock, Epstein sold the Pickwick stores in 1968 and retired in 1972.

Like the city he grew with, Epstein had no limits in scope. Bookselling was the center of his existence, but it was a nucleus for many professional and community activities. He served as president of every organization of booksellers in Los Angeles, including the Southern California chapter of the American Antiquarian Booksellers Association and the Southern California Booksellers Association (in that group's several incarnations). From 1956 to 1969, he was an officer of the American Booksellers Association, first as board member, eventually as president and chairman of the board. He is a member of the Los Angeles Corral of the Westerners, the Friends of the UCLA Library, and the Los Angeles Library Association, and numerous other organizations.

Always active in the Jewish community as well, Epstein was involved with fund raising for the various Jewish philanthropic organizations in the book trade and among the businessmen of Hollywood. He has been a member of Temple Israel of Hollywood for years.

Today Louis Epstein enjoys an active retirement. He remains in touch with the inner workings of Pickwick (even as the chain becomes submerged under the B. Dalton

name), lunching frequently with his successor, Elliot Leonard, and visiting the store, where he continues to be greeted warmly as "Mr. E" by those employees who worked for him. He attends meetings and conventions of booksellers, rarely misses a neighborhood book sale or a copy of AB Bookman's Weekly. He remains close to those of his contemporaries who remain in the book trade, such as Jake Zeitlin; and to younger booksellers, he represents as much a legend as a reality.

A magnetic man, an energetic man, Louis Epstein embodies the dynamism, spunk, and savvy that enabled him to grow along with the city that he adopted--and that adopted him.

In the following pages, which consist of a transcript of tape-recorded interviews made with the UCLA Oral History Program, Louis Epstein describes in his own words his life as a bookseller, as well as the parallel growth of the book trade of Los Angeles and the many characters and personalities who peopled it. This interview is part of the Program's series on Printing and the Book Trade. Records relating to this interview are located in the office of the UCLA Oral History Program.

Joel Gardner

Los Angeles, California

May, 1977

INTERVIEW HISTORY

INTERVIEWER: Joel R. Gardner, Editor-Interviewer, UCLA Oral History Program. BA, MA, French, Tulane University; MA, Journalism, UCLA.

TIME AND SETTING OF INTERVIEW:

Place: Louis Epstein's home, 7140 Senalda Road, Hollywood, California.

Dates: May 13, 20, June 11, 17 [video session], July 2, 15, 29, August 13, 1974.

Time of day, length of sessions and total number of recording hours: Interviewing took place on a day-long basis. Sessions began in the morning, continued to lunch, then resumed after a lunch break. In sum, conversations averaged five hours spread over an eight-hour day. Nineteen and one-half hours were recorded.

Persons present during interview: Gardner and Epstein. Mrs. Epstein assisted at the interviews on several occasions. Bernard Galm, director of the Program, operated the camera for the video session.

CONDUCT OF THE INTERVIEW:

In preparation, the interviewer availed himself of materials from the UCLA Library's Department of Special Collections pertaining to the local book trade. The interviewer's approach was biographical and chronological. The major purpose of the interview was to gather information pertaining to the history of the book trade in Southern California, in which the respondent played an active role as seller of both antiquarian and trade books. Therefore, the interviewer sought out Mr. Epstein's personal background, the history of his own bookshops, and his involvement in associations of book dealers, particularly the American Booksellers Association. The interviewer also sought information pertaining to the Jewish community of Los Angeles, particularly aspects of its growth and charitable institutions.

Mr. Epstein provided, from his own research, a year-by-year listing of the bookstores of the Los Angeles

area, with a commentary on the proprietors of the many shops.

EDITING:

Editing was performed by Mr. Gardner, who checked the verbatim transcript for accuracy and edited it for punctuation, paragraphing, spelling, and verification of proper names. The final manuscript remains in the same order as the taped material. Words or phrases introduced by the editor have been bracketed.

Mr. Epstein reviewed and approved the edited transcript. He made minor corrections and deletions, and provided or confirmed spellings of names that had not been verified previously.

Lawrence Weschler, Assistant Editor, UCLA Oral History Program, prepared the index. Mr. Gardner wrote the introduction. Front matter was assembled by the Program staff.

SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS:

The original tape recordings, video tape, and edited transcripts of the interviews are in the University Archives and are available under the regulations governing the use of noncurrent records of the university.

ERRATA

Page 60 does not exist.

Pages 7a, 153a, and 172a exist to correct the pagination.

TAPE NUMBER: I, SIDE ONE

MAY 13, 1974

GARDNER: To begin with, where were you born? What was the date? And tell me something about your family.

EPSTEIN: Well, I was born, as near as we can tell between the Jewish calendar and the Gregorian calendar, on December 8, 1901, in a tiny hamlet--I don't know if it's big enough to even to be called a hamlet--called Kasheritz. Now, spell it any way you like, because unless you spell it in Russian, you can't spell it any other way. I can't spell it in Russian. There were probably about ten, twelve Jewish families in the hamlet and maybe about twenty-five, thirty-five non-Jewish families.

GARDNER: Where is that?

EPSTEIN: That's in west central Russia, or the central part of west Russia. It's in White Russia, as they call it--Belorussia. The village, as I recollect, was on the River Berezina, and I remember seeing logs floating down every spring (or whenever they float logs). People had a little hut on top of the raft of logs. Great, tremendous things, three or four of them, tied one to another, and one or two people guiding them down the river. That's one of my earlier childhood memories.

In this tiny village, like most Russian villages or hamlets or whatever you want to call them, they had one

person who owned most of the land around there, and he was called the porets. A porets is less than a prince. It's a landholder--the kind of thing you read about. Just one step above serfdom is actually what it was at the time. And the Jews there, they made their living mostly off of each other, sewing for each other and occasionally for the local people. My people were smiths, blacksmiths. That was what they had practiced for generations, and that's what they did then.

And my early recollections of the village are . . . well, I left there when I was seven and a half years old, so going to the river, occasionally getting a ride when the wagons when they're going to pick the potato crop. That was one of the thrills. They let me hold the reins. I remember that distinctly. I don't have an excellent memory for the childhood affairs.

You see, I was a year old when my father left the old country to make his fortune. He went to Holland and to England and then landed in New York, of course. He used to send very little back, because it took him six years to save up enough money to send for his family. So I don't remember my father in my early childhood, because he wasn't there.

GARDNER: What was your father's name?

EPSTEIN: Reuben.

GARDNER: Reuben Epstein.

EPSTEIN: Yes. He was in business here for many years.

GARDNER: So you were raised by your mother, then.

EPSTEIN: Well, my mother, and I had. . . . I was the youngest of five children that he left when he went away. My oldest sister, Rose, who is now well in her eighties--lives here--occasionally we get to talking, and I asked her one day, "Well, how did you make a living if Father had nothing to send you?" She said, "Well, I used to take care of the children and my mother would go to sew."

GARDNER: It's like Fiddler on the Roof.

EPSTEIN: Well, in one of the ways, except there they had a milkman father. [laughter] She was a good needlewoman, and she had a very fine relationship with the wife of a local priest. They established what my sister said was a very nice relationship, and she was very often helped by this woman. She would be given clothing that she no longer needed. But at no time do I remember ever having been hungry, or unclothed, or unfed, or uncared for.

We lived in a thatched-roof house. You know, people say, "Well, a log cabin. Lincoln was born in a log cabin." So was I. [laughter] And I doubt whether I had very more amenities than Lincoln had. No plumbing. But I don't remember any discomforts. We lived, we played, and we played with other children. The only time we were scared

was when the Cossacks were coming through, or any other strangers.

GARDNER: Did that happen often?

EPSTEIN: Well, periodically they would pass through the village and Jews just took to hiding. We didn't want to be around, especially the girls. We hid them as best we could. I remember that. And then going to the cheder--which you will have to translate . . . [laughter]

GARDNER: . . . for our transcriber.

EPSTEIN: I remember the first time, I recollect back in my memory that I was carried there by my older brother or somebody. And whenever we passed a non-Jew--there were no sidewalks--we just kept our distance, knowing that it was nothing for a non-Jew for no reason at all to either strike you, or insult you, or spit at you. It's hard to believe.

GARDNER: It is, and yet it isn't, of course.

EPSTEIN: Yes. From reading, you know that that has happened, but from actual experience you think, "Well, how could people do that?" Well, they did it. And a lot of them I don't think meant real harm by it. It was just one of the things that they had to do. I had a--if you'll allow me to digress a bit . . .

GARDNER: Yes, go ahead.

EPSTEIN: . . . I had a woman working for me here at the

Hollywood store in the office, and she is of Rumanian background, non-Jewish. And she went from Rumania to Canada and from Canada she came to Los Angeles. And one day we got to talking about these things in front of two or three people in the office, reminiscing--well, they were asking me questions about the same type of thing we're talking about now, my background. And this woman spoke up. She said, "You know, I know exactly what Mr. E is talking about. My mother told me to do the things that he said were done to them." Her mother told her, and I suspect that it was ingrained in the populace to do these things. To them, they didn't think they were committing a sin or a crime or causing any commotion. But when you're on the receiving end of it. . . .

And it was a most remarkable thing that in spite of all that, we kept face between ourselves and our own Jewish community. We were forced upon each other. People would say sometimes, "Well, didn't they mix more with the others? Why didn't they get a more general education than just going to cheder?" Number one, there was no other school. And number two, even if you're the smartest person in town, you couldn't go away to a high school, a gymnasium, some city which had [one]--I don't know how far away the city was. The closest gymnasium was probably Bobruysk, which was maybe a hundred and some-odd miles in a horse and wagon,

and a hundred and some-odd miles was quite a bit when you had no trains. I never saw a train till the day I got on a train when we left Bobruysk. From our little village, when we left, we went by wagon to Bobruysk, and it was quite a journey.

That is the background, the sociological background. Sometimes I wonder how we lived through it. But my older sister says, "Well, we pitched in; we got along on very little." We had a cow, I remember, and one time we had a fire. The cow came to our windows. We didn't have a fire in our own home, but the village half-burned away.

GARDNER: What's curious is that in such a small community, with the Jews and the non-Jews really comprising such small populations, that they were still incapable of mixing.

EPSTEIN: Well, in some ways they mixed well. In other ways--if they were a little drunk, all these things came out; they just hung right out there.

GARDNER: What about stores and businesses and things like that?

EPSTEIN: Stores? There were no stores and businesses.

GARDNER: Well, little shops, general shops?

EPSTEIN: They had one tiny--what they called a kretschma (it translates: it's a meeting place, it's a store), where all the business was transacted. It was mostly barter business. You went to the city and bought a piece of cloth,

and you found somebody who would sew it up for you, to make a suit or a dress or whatever. And for that you did something for them. Because there was no money. There was some money, but we had to buy grains and food, from which we baked and so forth, from the non-Jews.

But it was a very small, very poor community, as most of those places were. The people whom we met, they didn't own any land. They rented or they were given pieces of land to operate. I don't know whether they were operating for the porets, as I call him, the landowner. I'm positive that none of the peasants we knew owned land in the sense that they could transfer it. They might have been given a right to do certain things and perhaps give half the crop to the landowner. But there were vast pieces of land which I know they farmed for the porets.

GARDNER: And your family had been there for quite some time, I assume.

EPSTEIN: Most of those families may have been there for hundreds of years. I really don't know. We never thought about it. We were there, and nobody knows when we weren't there. We didn't keep any records.

GARDNER: You said that your father's family--or your family--had been smiths and so forth. What about your mother's side?

EPSTEIN: My mother's family came from Parets, some twenty

miles away, which was a little bit larger. She had a brother who would be compared to a plasterer now. He made ovens. . . . We lived in a one-and-a-half-room log cabin. The half-room was used for storage. The oven was built in one corner--brick, plaster, mortar, whatever it was made of, very thick walls. And above that some of the family used to sleep, because it was warm. Then, of course, there were other places to sleep in other parts of the house. So you had to have somebody come and build an oven. He used to build ovens. Sometimes in his village or town they had--some of them had--what we could call "people of means"--which probably wouldn't mean too much today. He used to make tile ovens for some people; he would decorate them with tile and things like that. Those were something terrific. And then they would have a cooking oven separate from the general oven.

GARDNER: What was your mother's name?

EPSTEIN: Her Jewish name was Sprishe. No one can say it. I don't know how she and my father met, but, you know, people move around and meet people. I don't know too much about the background of her family. She would talk generally about her brothers, and then they all came out here, too. They lived in the Bayonne, New Jersey, area when they came here and later moved to the New York area. When we came, we arrived in Cleveland.

GARDNER: What were the rest of your family? Can you go through your brothers and sisters and so forth?

EPSTEIN: Yes. As I mentioned, my oldest sister is Rose. She's well in her eighties. She lives here on Harper Avenue with a daughter, Cornelia August. There were three brothers. Then there was one sister who came over who is now gone. She died in 1929 of TB. Then there was one sister who was born here. After the parents got together in America, they had to have one Amerikanische child, so my younger sister was born here. There were three brothers.

GARDNER: Tell what the names were, too.

EPSTEIN: All right. My older sister is Rose, and my younger sister is Cema. Her last name is Ehrlich. She's recently become married and lives out here. My brothers are Morris, the oldest one; and Ben, the middle one, who was in the book business; and myself. That was the family. The five came here when we left Russia.

GARDNER: I guess the next story would be the story of your trip leaving and what the circumstances were there.

EPSTEIN: In my childhood it was an exciting time. Of course, we knew it was very exciting; getting ready, packing things, and what we packed. And going by wagon from one place, from the tiny hamlet we were in, to a little town called Glussk. I never found the village or hamlet I was in on a map, but I did find Glussk. (The "G"

in Russian has a sort of "H" sound. They use a Greek-type alphabet.) I remember spending the night at Glussk, and from there we went again by wagon to Bobruysk. That was a real city. And curiously, to show you what a benighted place we came from, I had never seen a bicycle until I left. I was seven and a half years old, and this was the year 1909, and I'd never seen a bicycle. When I got to this little city of Glussk, I saw a bicycle. There I was, a child, looking at that thing as if the man was riding by magic. And I'd never seen a train. And I didn't see a train until we were ready to get on one at Bobruysk that took us to Riga, where we got on a boat.

GARDNER: Had any of the family been out of the hamlet at all at that point, other than your mother?

EPSTEIN: They went to Glussk, and maybe one or two may have been to Bobruysk; I don't know. But they never talked about a bicycle or a train, so apparently they didn't see it, either. [laughter] I remember fishing in the river and being taken there, fishing through the ice in the wintertime. That was the general childhood.

GARDNER: Where did you stay when the family went from hamlet to town to city? Where would you have stayed overnight?

EPSTEIN: Well, I don't recollect where we spent the nights. In Bobruysk we had some relatives. My mother had some

relatives in Bobruysk. I don't remember any of my grandparents except that I remember one thing: when we got on the train in Bobruysk, there was a little red-headed old man who got on with us, and he was my mother's father. I'd never seen him before, and I've never seen him since. And I don't remember ever seeing my mother's mother--whether she was still alive at the time, I don't know. But my father's parents were all gone. My father had a number of brothers living there, and gradually they all came over. My father was one of the first to leave. He left with another brother. Where we stayed in Bobruysk--I knew we stayed with these people. It was very strange having to go up a stairway. [laughter] We'd never had a stairway.

GARDNER: Bicycles and stairways all at once.

EPSTEIN: It was all these things to a young child. I was frightened. I'd go out and see people--I would almost hide because they wore different clothes and did different things than we did. So we must have probably looked pretty primitive to them, too.

GARDNER: Could you tell at all, even though it was such a short time, how the Jewish families seemed to interact in the cities? Was it any different, or was it more or less the same?

EPSTEIN: Well, we didn't stay there long enough. I have no idea how they would interact. They looked, I suppose,

like anyone else. A citified person--how you would react to a country bumpkin. It was literally true. We had no manners, in the sense that we had ordinary graces but, I mean, city manners--I wouldn't know what they were. We were a civilized race in the sense of what we learned every day in our cheder, and we went to the synagogue. A Jew has to have certain ethics. You don't do this, and you don't do that. You live up to them. You can't help but acquire some of those ethics: what to do and what not to do in our own family and between our own relatives. You had to have a certain amount of decorum. But for manners as where to eat in a restaurant, how to eat; I'm sure that we had good table manners, but maybe not the restaurant type of good table manners. I suppose in a restaurant--if we did go to a restaurant, and I don't think we did--the manners we probably would have seen were probably not the same kind that you would see in Chasen's. [laughter]

GARDNER: Next you could describe the trip. We've gotten you to Riga, I suppose. Then you went from there in a roundabout way to Cleveland.

EPSTEIN: Yeah, then we went to Hull. Then we crossed England to Liverpool.

GARDNER: What are your recollections of that trip?

EPSTEIN: Stench, the first portion of it. I guess probably you've heard about steerage. You just can't imagine it. You go on a boat today, and you get a cabin. It may

not be a very nice cabin; but here they take a boat, and in the hold of it they build [shelves] like [you would in a] warehouse. But these weren't shelves for things; they were shelves for people. And each one would be allotted about 3 X 3 feet of space. You had to live there. You'd crawl in there and carry your food with you for the length of your trip. I don't know how many hundreds of people were in that hold. I don't know how many decks they had. I was too young. I was the only one in the family that didn't get sick, that could eat. The rest of them were sick.

GARDNER: Do you think that was because you were the youngest?

EPSTEIN: Probably, you know, the happy-go-lucky child. I used to run as much as possible, probably ran all over the place. And probably the exercise and getting in and out of the stench, because they couldn't do that. At any rate, if you asked me the primary thing about it, I would say that. But when we left England and got onto a larger boat, the Cedric, it was much better. We were in the steerage, but we had a place to sleep, like a little cot or something. And the food--we didn't carry food across the ocean--was good. At least, I thought it was good. My sisters and brothers admitted it was good food, but they couldn't eat very much of it. Number one, it wasn't kosher

food, so they had to pick out the food that they could eat and not hurt their conscience too much. And I didn't have any qualms; they didn't restrict me in any way.

But that boat I really enjoyed, because I remember running all over the place, up and down the decks, and nobody bothered me. There were always barrels of apples you could eat. I must have eaten everywhere on the ship, because I don't remember the food too much. You know, a seven-year-old kid just runs all over and has a good time. I always used to go to the back of the boat and watch the wake. They had a long line stretched out, and I think it measured the speed. I've always wanted to find out, so I mentioned that to somebody and I think they said that it measured the speed of the boat. Whether that's true or not, I don't know, but I sat there for hours and watched that thing. As I recollect, we had no storms going across. From the fact that I was out there so much, we must have had excellent weather. That was the middle of June.

GARDNER: Where did you come in, to New York?

EPSTEIN: We came into New York. My father was going to various places in this country. Finally, when he sent for us, he was at Cleveland, working there in a men's clothing factory where he was a presser. We landed in New York and took a train to Cleveland. He didn't come to New York to

greet us. So we got off in New York, went through the, as they called it, Castle Garden (Ellis Island).

GARDNER: Do you have any recollections of that?

EPSTEIN: Some, yes, the fact that they put a big tag on you and put us from one room to the other. We had to be examined for delousing and whatnot. [laughter] We were given a cursory examination by doctors, and then we were classified out, and somebody had to direct us to where we got the train, to take us to the train when we got the. . . . We must have gone across the river to get to the railroad station.

GARDNER: Grand Central, I suppose it would have been.

EPSTEIN: I don't know where it was; I have no idea.

GARDNER: It's interesting that with speaking no English whatsoever among your family, and having nobody to meet you, and yet you were able to find your way there.

EPSTEIN: Well, at the immigration office, they had Yiddish-speaking people there. To your generation, you have no idea what organizations they had. By that time, the Jewish communities in New York and the United States had already set up societies to help immigrants, especially new arrivals. You may have heard of HIAS. Well, HIAS stands for Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society. And they had people there who looked out for people like us. They would look at the address where we were going, and they would direct us. I'm sure they fed us, too. Being that young,

I don't have those recollections, but in reading later and in joining those organizations and contributing money to them in later years. . . . Our contributions were relatively fair according to our income; we contributed money. We do those things. And from there on, I think the path was made easier for us, because I don't know exactly what happened. I know that we went as a family group to this place where somebody directed us. We didn't know where to go, so there must have been somebody directing us. I'm positive it was an HIAS person who did it. For that we're quite thankful. They put us on a train, and I remember going up the ramp to get on the train. And [I remember] the stuff we carried with us: a featherbed, a samovar, a mortar and pestle like you see in antique shops. My sister has the samovar and mortar and pestle. I have a little thing here that I brought over. Nobody knows what the hell it is, but it's something that was created for keeping water warm in the oven over the Sabbath weekend. Let me show it to you. [tape recorder turned off] I carried it. It's apparently a homemade thing. You put water in that thing on Friday and put it in the oven, and you kept the oven warm over Friday night so you would have warm water for the Sabbath.

GARDNER: That's fabulous.

EPSTEIN: I suppose one of my relatives probably made it. They worked with metal. I've never seen one like it. I've

shown it to people who've been collecting, and I've said, "Well, tell me, what is this?" They've never seen it. Some of the things, of course--the family silverware, whatever that was. Imagine, carrying a great big feather-bed across here.

GARDNER: And especially having carried it all the way from your little hamlet.

EPSTEIN: All the way, oh, yes. And also a bottle of brandy which my mother made special for her husband, my father. It was almost as big as a five-gallon water bottle. And my brother Ben carried that. We got that all the way from the wagon trip, railroad trip, the two ship trips, crossing England trip, and all the way from New York. And on the way up the ramp to the train he was carrying that thing, and somebody came running down, hit his arm, and he dropped it. And that was the tragedy of tragedies. We all sat down and cried. And my story to this day is that he got an inferiority complex from that. [laughter]

Finally we got off at Cleveland. It was in the evening. And Father rushes to Mother and Mother rushes to Father. And here I am with this strange man whom I've never seen before, watching all this. It was sort of a peculiar reaction.

GARDNER: You were about eight at this time?

EPSTEIN: I was seven and a half years old. It was an emotional thing. I never saw my mother with him before.

We always heard of Father, but I'd never seen Father. I didn't know how a father reacts. At any rate, we were all greeted and so forth and so forth. Then we were taken to stay with a relative in Cleveland for about a week, and then we got our own place.

GARDNER: Where was it, do you recall? Do you remember anything about where you lived and so forth?

EPSTEIN: The events in this country, I remember much more vividly.

GARDNER: I guess because it's a vivid time of your life.

EPSTEIN: Much more vividly. Number one, nothing could be more vivid to a greenhorn boy like myself than living directly across the street from a fire station in Cleveland [laughter] and hearing the bells ring and [seeing] the horses running to their stations and the firemen sliding down the pole half-dressed--unhitching three hooks in the harness; the harness falls down to the horses and the horses are latched in three or four places; and boom! out they go, the hook and ladder and the firehorses and the engine. The way they started--how quickly they got to the fire. And the Dalmatian dogs, the kind Aaron has. Did you go to Aaron's house?

GARDNER: No.

EPSTEIN: Well, they have a Dalmatian. I used to sit up nights waiting for the bell to ring. We didn't live in that area too long, but I'll never forget that. The first

time I saw that, my eyes popped. And I became acquainted with the firemen directly across the street. The firemen were very nice to me, a poor kid from over there. They'd let me look around. Years and years later, after I was married and the children were, oh, I think they were five and six or six and seven, we took a trip east to Washington, my wife Ann's hometown, and on the way back we stopped at Cleveland. We just went down there to look at it, to look at that fire station. I wanted the children to see it.

GARDNER: Where was it? Do you remember the address?

EPSTEIN: East Thirty-seventh Street, near Central. It would probably be about the 2300 block of East Thirty-seventh.

GARDNER: And it's still there.

EPSTEIN: Well, it was. Probably still there. And one time, years before we came, it apparently was a nice part of town, because the people at the fire station when we came back later--this trip when I showed the children--said that the Halles used to live right next door to where the fire station was, and Halle was one of the early Jewish merchant families in the area. There's still a Halle's store there. I don't know how many stores they have there now. Well, we went to this fire station to see where the stalls for the horses were, and the same house, the same poles. I talked with a fireman. "Oh," he says, "that's a long

time ago." I asked, "Is there anybody here who might have been there at that period of time?" He says, "No, they're all gone."

GARDNER: What was the housing like and so forth? What were the buildings like? Were they houses or apartment houses?

EPSTEIN: No, they were not apartment houses. My father had been staying with some relatives. When we arrived, they cleared out one room for us. So we had the one, maybe two rooms at that house I'm telling about, a two-story house. We were upstairs. So that was the housing we first came to. My earliest recollection of housing of our own family was a flat at 2410 East Thirty-eighth Street. That I remember.

GARDNER: Was that the Jewish neighborhood at the time?

EPSTEIN: Yes. That was the Jewish area. And at 2410 East Thirty-eighth Street, there was Pacht's grocery store on the corner--we were about two houses from the corner--and the synagogue was on Scovill Avenue; it was right near Scovill.

If you'll allow me to digress and bring time forward, when I became president of the American Booksellers Association--this happened in Washington at a convention--there were a number of newspaper people, book people, who came to cover the convention. The New York Times had a person, the Tribune had a person, the Washington Post, and the

Cleveland Plain Dealer each had a person. Well, the man from the Plain Dealer, Wes Lawrence was his name. He's now retired. He was a columnist and a book reviewer for for them. So he interviewed me. He told me, "I'm Wes Lawrence from the Plain Dealer." "Oh," I said, "I used to work for your paper." He said, "You did?" "Yes," I said, "I used to deliver the paper and then sell it, the bulldog edition." (I don't know if you know what a bulldog edition is: the edition that comes out on Saturday night that's sold as a Sunday paper--it's a Sunday edition.) And I told him what I did, and he was interested. He said, "Where did you live?" I told him I lived at 2410 East Thirty-eighth Street. He said, "Oh, that's a slum now." I said, "Wes, I've got news for you. It was a slum then." [laughter] And you know, he quoted me in his column--he sent me a copy of it--and we still have a lot of relatives in Cleveland who read it and made some comments. [laughter] [They said that] I should not have said that, because they didn't consider it a slum; it was a respectable neighborhood.

GARDNER: Well, was it, in reality?

EPSTEIN: Well, by living standards today it would be called a slum area, because I'm sure the plumbing and electricity was not up to standard. It wasn't too far above. Look, a person who's supporting five children, and a sixth child on the way, making twelve dollars a week, could not have

lived anywhere else but something damned near a slum. And that was what my father's salary was. So when the first child came, he was given a one-dollar-a-week raise.

My early memories are quite pleasant. Of course, I was a youngster, and there was a hell of a lot of stuff that I was scared about. You know, everything was scary to me: to walk into a big building--I'd never been in a big building before--and see a person going up an elevator. Can you imagine? Just walk in and the thing goes up! I mean, our children, my grandchildren, probably if they'd find a building without an elevator they'd have the same reaction. [laughter] And then having to go to school--we got in in June, and by September I was already being enrolled in school.

GARDNER: That was going to be my next question. What was it like going into the school?

EPSTEIN: Well, by that time I had three months to become acquainted with the neighbors' children and the neighborhood we were in, and I began to feel a little bit at home in the community, especially amongst the children. I learned to play a little bit of ball. You know, children adapt very quickly. I found out that marbles were to play with (I'd never seen marbles before). I didn't have any difficulties.

GARDNER: How about with the language?

EPSTEIN: The language, I seem to have picked up pretty well. Unlike some communities such as New York, where you don't hear any English, there was enough English there. The children all spoke English outside. It seems that we all picked up the language fairly well, and we had no difficulties in school. My brother Ben, who is six years older than I, got through grammar school in two years. And I got through in seven.

GARDNER: Grammar school was up to eighth grade, wasn't it at that time?

EPSTEIN: Yes. I remember being put into this class, and little by little I acquired it. But apparently I was not a bad student. I must have had native intelligence [laughter] or been born with something. After the first few months, I don't recollect having problems. [tape recorder turned off] I had no difficulties in school except that as I became older, I was a bad boy. I don't know what. . . .

GARDNER: At what point was this?

EPSTEIN: In the higher grades.

GARDNER: Oh, in the higher grades.

EPSTEIN: Yeah. Well, most of us kids--we were a rough-and-tumble crowd. You learned to play football; you learned to fight; you learned to play baseball. And being tough was one of the things you did, I think. [laughter] I can understand where some kids want to be tough simply as a

self-expression. They have no other way to express themselves except maybe rebellion against authority. But what I don't approve of is becoming violent and carrying guns and throwing bombs and blowing up buildings.

GARDNER: You never did that when you were growing up.

EPSTEIN: No, I never did that. [laughter] Unless we got in an argument with the teacher and got slapped around. [laughter]

GARDNER: What was the school you went to?

EPSTEIN: Case. Case School. Fortieth and Central.

GARDNER: Was it associated with the college?

EPSTEIN: No. I know, you're thinking Case was the college. Now it's Case Western Reserve.

GARDNER: It was just named after the same fellow.

EPSTEIN: It was named after the same person, apparently a wealthy person who gave land for a school, helped establish the college there. The school was called Case. I think Fortieth Street was Case Avenue.

We had a mixed population with some Italian, some black. In that particular school I suppose it was probably half-Jewish, and the rest were non-Jewish. So we had a good mixture to mix with, to learn. We could learn from each other. (The trouble with some schools in some areas is that they're 100 percent one kind.) So to an immigrant boy that was a great thing. And I acquired reading and

writing with no problems.

GARDNER: What about religious education? Did you keep going to cheder?

EPSTEIN: Religious education--my father was, of course, very much preoccupied. He neglected our religions education, in a sense. It wasn't till a number of years later when we moved to another area--several years later, maybe; I don't know how many years--that we got a rabbi to come to our home to teach me. The others were too old to do it. They'd had their religious education in the old country.

GARDNER: And they'd already been Bar Mitzvahed over there.

EPSTEIN: Yes. So it was up to me. So we got through that.

GARDNER: But you never went to Hebrew school.

EPSTEIN: No, I never went to a Hebrew school or cheder in this country. I had this rabbi. I can read the Hebrew. I don't understand it hardly at all. For that reason, probably, we joined a Reform synagogue, although I still keep a membership in the Orthodox synagogue in Boyle Heights, Breed Street Shul, if you happen to know that. My father was a good member there. He did a lot in the community in Boyle Heights, the Jewish community there. And when he died, the rabbi, Zilberstein, whom I knew, who died a couple of years ago, he said to both my brother Ben and myself, "Look, your father was a pillar of this community and a pillar of this synagogue, and we want to maintain his

membership"--which we did gladly. And I still maintain it.

GARDNER: Was your father Orthodox, then?

EPSTEIN: Yes.

GARDNER: But he was too busy to keep the family Orthodox?

EPSTEIN: Well, he observed all the holidays and all that, and he went to shul--he didn't go all the time--but primarily in those days he was just too busy to take care of those things.

GARDNER: And he didn't drag you to shul with him.

EPSTEIN: No. He didn't drag us to it, and to be honest with you, I don't think he went too often himself. But that's another chapter we might be talking about. He later stopped working in the factory and opened up a little store. And then he had to just work there day and night, seven days a week, to make a go of it. Which he eventually did.

GARDNER: I think we have a little more tape on this side. How long did you live in that house?

EPSTEIN: We lived in that house for about three years, I suspect, at 2410. Then we moved to another house further up on Thirty-eighth Street towards Woodland Avenue. I think that's going towards the south, if I'm not mistaken. We lived there a relatively short time. Then we moved to Central Avenue, and my dad opened a little store, his first

little store. He opened on Central Avenue. And we lived there for a number of years. All told, I lived in Cleveland from 1909 to 1923.

TAPE NUMBER: I, SIDE TWO

MAY 13, 1974

GARDNER: Okay, we've got you into high school.

EPSTEIN: I got through high school pretty well. I was on the second team of the basketball squad, and later I was a substitute on the first team. I never became a star. [laughter]

I'll come back a little more to the earlier days. Again, we never suffered for want, that I can recollect. We always wore decent clothes, clean, always had ample food on the table, and my father sweated it out. He provided it. My older sister went to work, and my older brother went to work. Ben and I, the younger boys, went on to school. Yetta went to school. Yetta's the one who passed away later.

GARDNER: What sort of work did your brother do at that time?

EPSTEIN: They went to work in clothing shops, clothing manufacturers. The needle trades were the Jewish trades. Later on he tried his hand at carpentry. Some of the other relatives who came later, they all became carpenters and construction people, and they did extremely well in later years.

I remember when my sister Cema was born, and I was eight years old, and the doctor came to the house. I remember

he came out of the room and asked me to roll up his sleeves for him. [laughter] I remember heating the water and all that. We had sickness in the family. I had typhoid; we had mumps. Typhoid almost wrecked me. That's where I lost most of my hearing. My ears became infected, and nobody took care of them.

GARDNER: How old were you then?

EPSTEIN: Well, it was shortly after my sister was born. I must have been nine or ten years old. My ears became infected, and I never remember going to the doctor. In later years, when I went to the doctor here, he examined my ears and he said, "You know, you had a mastoid. I don't know how you survived." At the time, when I told him what had happened, he said, "Well, it's evident. I can tell from your ears now." The eardrums were practically eaten away, and my hearing gradually became worse and worse.

I got typhoid--there was a Jewish settlement house in the area, and I used to go there occasionally with some of the other children. And they had a camp one summer. I went to sign up to go to the camp, and I remember going with the group. They had the big Red Cars in those days, too, in Cleveland, like they had here; they'd go out into the country.

But after I was there, I remember, oh, I enjoyed it for the first couple of days. And then I got a headache,

a very severe headache, which was something I'd never had before. So I told one of the kids about it; and you know, I was suffering. So they took me to the leader, the group leader or whatever, and he took me to what was supposed to have been a nurse. She examined me. I don't know whether she took my temperature or not, but she immediately got somebody to put me in a car to take me back home, [she] sent me home. When I got home I must have had a temperature of about 106. So they called a doctor. And the doctor immediately put me to bed. And I remember for weeks just lying there with this horrible--I still remember it. The fever was fantastic--the heat in my head.

Thank goodness I survived it. But the doctor to this day doesn't know how it was. My sister tells me, "Probably because you were so sick when you were an infant, you established immunities then." On two occasions I was on a deathbed, in my infancy. She said at one time that I was gone and she ran to the house of an uncle [Berril Hirsch] to ask him to come help. He said, "Never mind, he'll live," and he never came. He lived to be 108, so it must be because he never took anything seriously. [telephone rings, tape stopped] Did I leave off about the . . . ?

GARDNER: Well, we were talking pretty much about how you were afflicted with the typhoid and the effects of it later.

EPSTEIN: The medical facilities we had available to us at the time--the doctors of that day didn't have antibiotics. By the time I came out here, my hearing from time to time used to become distorted; so I would go to the doctor. My ear doctor when I was out here was the one that told me that normally a person in those days succumbed to that because they had no antibiotics. Anyway, here I am. I survived. [laughter]

One of the curious things, speaking of that period of education: turtleneck sweaters were the rage a couple of years ago and a lot of people still wear them now. We used to wear them, but one day the principal and the teachers got together, and they took a neck examination. And every one of the kids had a dirty neck. And they wore these sweaters to hide them. So they were forbidden. We had to stop wearing the turtleneck sweaters to school. [laughter] To this day, I haven't had a turtleneck sweater.

GARDNER: That's an interesting sidelight. [laughter] Well, anyway, you went to high school, you mentioned, at East Tech. What were your educational interests at that time?

EPSTEIN: Well, I had many curiosities but no direction. One of the things in our family, I regret to say that there wasn't too much direction of the younger children in the sense that the parents themselves didn't know how to direct us. And in my own particular case, I was still not my

father's son in the sense that I grew up with a father. It took me many, many years, and not till I was a full-grown man with a family of my own, that my father and I had a rapport, a full-blown rapport. But in those days, I sometimes resented him. He would want to discipline me--and often did, of course, which was his right and his duty--but I always had a resistance towards what he wanted to do with me. I don't know whether it was because we hadn't been together for so long, or whether it was just a normal thing between a youngster and his father in other areas. And so I was left, as far as my educational trends were, to follow any lead that I thought I would like. With all due respect to my father, it was not a matter of hate or anything like that. We got along in that respect. He didn't have time to give me, number one, and he probably was timid towards me himself because I was new to him in that sense.

GARDNER: What were his relations like with your older brothers?

EPSTEIN: We were not in that sense a close-knit family when we were younger. There were education differences. Ben and I and Yetta went to school. (Helen, she would call herself, or Yetta.) The others went to work. There were different interests in their lives. I don't know if you're aware of this: if a person comes to a country, if he's

past teen-age, he will never lose his accent completely.

GARDNER: That's interesting.

EPSTEIN: Whereas if you come as a young child, such as I did, and my brother Ben and sister Yetta [did], we lost our accent. Our interests were different. We were the educated. We went to school, and we had different interests; and they, of course, went with the older crowd and with the immigrants, and they stayed immigrants in that sense. By no means did we look down on them, but they didn't have the opportunity to go to school--they had to go to work.

But Ben and myself were six years apart, and he was just a little too far away from me. Yetta and I got along very well. I got along with Ben, too, but there wasn't that close attachment where we learned from one another or where one guided the other. There just wasn't that.

So I went to a technical high school, and I thought I wanted to be an engineer. In those days engineers were considered--that was a prime profession. I went to a technical high school, and then I went on to college. And I entered Ohio State University, and I thought I'd start in engineering school. You had to take two hours of drawing, three, four days a week, and I said, "This is no life for Louis." So I changed to accounting. And that was even worse. So then I changed to prelaw. I took my general courses very well. I did relatively well.

My mathematics was good, and English was all right, and history. Then when I got to law school, I did very well.

GARDNER: What was Ohio State like at that time?

EPSTEIN: Ohio State was, of course, nowhere near as big as it is today. It had about 8,000 students. Having gone to no other school, I have no way to measure it. But it was considered a good school.

GARDNER: What was the social atmosphere like?

EPSTEIN: Well, it all depends where you came from.

GARDNER: Considering where you came from, what was the social atmosphere like?

EPSTEIN: The social atmosphere was fine for a guy who joined a fraternity and had the money to join a fraternity. They were a lot of fun. I lived in a boarding house, and I worked part time. I still had a lot of fun, but there was definite cleavage of social life.

GARDNER: Was there much Jewish participation?

EPSTEIN: Yes, they had a Menorah Society at that time; and now they have a Hillel. In those days they had a Menorah Society, and we had regular meetings with fairly good attendance. We had affairs, parties. And the local people--one of the local people was a man by the name of Lazarus, who started the Lazarus Department Stores, which later became Federated [Federated Department Stores]. [telephone rings; tape stopped] He took a great interest in Jewish

students, and once a year he'd invite them to his home, I think around Passover time or something, for those who didn't leave for the holidays. And he supported the Menorah group, furnished them, I suppose, with funds to have a little party every time they had a meeting--refreshments and one thing and another. And that's the way half of the students lived. I had a roommate. A lot of us had gone to the same high school or came from the same neighborhood of Cleveland, and we met others from Akron, Canton, wherever. So the Jewish group formed friendships there. Then we became friendly with a lot of non-Jewish students, very fine boys and girls.

GARDNER: Had Ben gone to Ohio State, too?

EPSTEIN: No, he went to Western Reserve, which is now Case Western Reserve. He only went one year. Ben was an undisciplined person in that he didn't want the regimentation of a school or university. And Ben, about that time, was becoming a sick boy. You see, Ben has had TB ever since he's been a teenager. No one ever expected him to live to the age that he is now. He's seventy-nine. And curiously enough, his wife was the same thing. She was a young TB. They met in a sanatorium. "Why should I marry a woman who's sick?" I said, "What have you got to lose?" [laughter]

Sometimes when I think back about it, it's a little bit lack of direction, lack of knowledge by our parents,

really, of what to do, how to guide their children--lack of time. See, my father was a very intense worker, and when he worked, nothing could interfere with him. And he had a lot to do. He had to provide enough money to support his six children.

GARDNER: Was he still working at the factory at this time?

EPSTEIN: No. By the time I'm talking about, he had long ceased [that]. I think he started about three or four years after we arrived, which would be about 1913--'12 or '13 when he started going into business for himself.

GARDNER: Maybe you ought to tell that story again that we went through at lunch, about how he happened into that.

EPSTEIN: Oh, how he got into business for himself. Well, he was working as a presser in a men's clothing factory. I think the name was Korach. It was a clothing manufacturer by the name of Korach in Chicago, and also one branch of the family was in Cleveland. He was a presser. He would see garments that were a little bit damanged, maybe with a spot of oil from the machine or whatever, or a garment that wasn't made right for whatever reason. So one day he asked his boss if he would sell him some damaged garments, and he would try to sell them to some of the neighbors in the area at a very low price. His boss agreed to do that, and he bought about a hundred dollars' worth. He had the knowledge to have some flyers imprinted, and we children passed them

around the neighborhood. And one Sunday they brought in enough people to sell out the whole batch of merchandise that he'd bought. So he probably did very well with it. So he continued to buy those things from his boss and then later on he figured out that if his manufacturing outfit had some damaged merchandise, that some of the others would have, too--which, of course, they did. And he made arrangements to buy them, and gradually he built up enough business so he felt that he could afford to take the risk to give up his job. One doesn't give up a living for eight people, six children [and his wife] and himself. Finally he did and started a little store. He did all right in the sense that he still was able to support his family, perhaps even a little better than when he was working. Then he started buying other merchandise. He used to go down to a market over in one section of Cleveland--I think Thirteenth and Orange Street. He used to push a pushcart there, full of this kind of merchandise to spread about on the sidewalk, and I used to help him push that pushcart and take care of the merchandise, help him operate that little piece of square that he was allowed to use. They would allot so many feet to each person, enough to park your pushcart and give you maybe 5 X 5 feet or 6 X 6 feet or more display space on the sidewalk. And Cleveland at that time still--though now second- and third-generation--

had a large foreign population--Russians, a lot of Polish, a lot of Hungarians, a lot of "Bohemians," as they used to call them, now Czechoslovaks. They used to come down to that market. Of course, I being very young, my job was to watch. And if my father found my attention straying somewhere else, I'd get a whack across the--"Why aren't you watching?"

GARDNER: He was actually training you very young for the rigors of business.

EPSTEIN: Well, I learned a lot of merchandising from him. In later years I had a theory of display which I called the "pushcart theory." And everybody at the Pickwick knows the pushcart theory. You put your merchandise out so that it can be best seen and easily touched, and use up all your space to the best advantage--which is the theory of all retail business. I used that to dramatize that theory; I call it the pushcart theory. I told them that I lived through it--which I suppose I did. [laughter]

And then he prospered at it, started taking in other types of merchandise; and later on he traveled to other cities to buy from knitting mills where he bought sweaters. In those days they used to wear this very heavy underwear, and he'd go to mills of that type that made that woolen underwear and buy that. One time he, with another man, went in on a deal where they bought two carloads, <u>two carloads</u>,

of corsets. [laughter] Two carloads of corsets. They rented an empty store in downtown Cleveland and ran a sale for I don't know how many months, and they did very well with it. So he got to the point where he was making a very decent living. He was able to pay part of my expenses in college and all that.

GARDNER: Well, that takes us back then to law school, which you had just started to mention.

EPSTEIN: Well, that's a hard thing. To go on from there, I was in law school, and I was a good student in law school. And then, as I told you, Ben was a TB, and Yetta had TB; Ben survived and Yetta didn't. Ben shipped out to Arizona and California. He worked some of the time, and some of the time he had to be supported. But then when Yetta became sick with TB and had to leave Cleveland, she was sent out to California, and she lived in a room--whatnot. She sent letters back home: she was feeling well, sometimes she wasn't feeling well. And it was sort of a heartbreaking thing for the family--you know, the mother and father sending out the daughter. The theory was that boys could get along better and much easier than girls. So the family decided to pull up stakes and move to California. My father said, "Well, if I can do this kind of business here, I'll be able to do it in California." So he sold off everything. By that time he owned his own home.

And I was to remain in Columbus. The whole family moved and I was to remain in Columbus. And I had a very guilty feeling about it. I felt that I should be with the family and maybe help them. Of course, the feeling was all right, but the amount of help I thought I could furnish him was all wrong. So I pulled up stakes and dropped out of law school.

GARDNER: How far along were you?

EPSTEIN: I was practically through my second year. I was two-thirds through my second year, or one year and one quarter to go. And the dean of the law school, Judge [John Jay] Adams, said, "Epstein, don't drop out"--(he used to call me Epstein; they used to always call [you] by the last name)--"Epstein, don't drop out." He said, "They don't come back." "Oh," I said, "I'll be back, Judge. I'll be maybe out a year." "Well," he said, "I hate to lose you. You're a darned good student. You know, you're headed for the [Order of the] Coif." (You know what the Coif is? Similar to Phi Beta Kappa. The honor law society.) "Well," he said, "in case you can't come right back here. . . ." He wrote me a letter, dictated a letter to his secretary: "To whom it may concern," what he thought my capabilities as a law student were. He said, "You'll be able to get into any law school. But you go back to school even if you can't come back here." I fully intended to, of course, but

I never did. Well, that's the end of my law career.

Then I came out here, and I had to get readjusted to everything. The family was nervous about the two ill people, and my father had to start all over again. But he opened a store, and he started going around to the shops here, the dress factories, and he made his contacts. He had a good personality; he was a very trustworthy person. In later years I found people who'd dealt with him, long after he was gone and I had matured into my own business. There are some very interesting stories, one in particular.

He made a go of it and did quite well, even during the Depression. He came here in '23, and the period of adjustment took several months. He started a new business, and then a few years later the Depression came along. But he made his contacts, and he would buy from these people. But he stopped traveling around looking for other kinds of things. He was well known in Boyle Heights. Every woman who ever lived in Boyle Heights at the time that he operated the store knew him, because all the women used to come in to buy remnants and dresses and whatever he had. He became a member of the synagogue, and he used to contribute to everything that came along.

GARDNER: What synagogue was that?

EPSTEIN: The Breed Street Shul, what they called the Breed Street Shul. Congregation Talmud Torah is the actual name.

It still exists on Breed Street, and I still maintain a membership there.

GARDNER: Where was the shop?

EPSTEIN: His shop was on Brooklyn Avenue. He had one shop first on Brooklyn, just about four doors from Soto Street, and then later on he bought a building, a bank building--a bank that had gone broke, one of the Hellman banks. It was called the United States Bank, I think, at that time. It was owned by the Hellman people. They went broke during the Depression, and after a few years the building came up for sale. And my father wanted a little bit larger place. If he could have his own building, he wanted to. He was able to buy it, in those days, relatively cheap, because all buildings were cheap but money was scarce. Anyway, he bought it; he moved his business there, the corner of Brooklyn and Cornwell. There is now a Mexican bakery there. He was there for quite a number of years.

GARDNER: Where did you live when you first moved out here?

EPSTEIN: My first place of residence was off of Santa Barbara [Avenue] west of Normandie Street, Dalton Avenue.

GARDNER: This was a long way from Boyle Heights.

EPSTEIN: Well, he didn't move to Boyle Heights till after he was there for a while, then he built a house. He had a house built in Boyle Heights. He didn't go back and forth. First, for a few months he was dealing with another man who

had a place on Central Avenue. He didn't get along with this man. Well, he was a better operator than this man was, so there was no point for him to stay with him. I'm trying to think of the name of the street.

GARDNER: Was that a Jewish neighborhood then, on Santa Barbara?

EPSTEIN: In those days a lot of Jews lived near Western Avenue. This was not too far from Western. It wasn't totally a Jewish neighborhood; it was a mixed neighborhood at the time. Western Avenue was supposed to have become a big street, but it never did. For one reason or another, business did not go that way. There was a Jewish community in the Western Avenue area. They had a small synagogue there, but we never joined that. Then he built this home in Boyle Heights on Brittania Street. By that time, he opened the store. As I say, he did quite well. He took care of everything that he had to take care of--all of the doctor bills; they were fantastic.

So I was out here, and I was at a loss for what to do. I was of absolutely no help to my parents. I would have been better off to have followed Judge Adams's advice and stayed where I was. But I had a guilt feeling, and that's the way it was.

GARDNER: Did you look for work?

EPSTEIN: I looked for work, but I had no training for any

work. My brother had worked for a produce company when he was well, so he knew produce. So somebody suggested that he and I go into the produce business, and we found a place for sale, or somebody found it for us, told us about it, on 111th and Main Street, which was way out, in those days--this was 1924, now. We sold produce at a produce stand and a few staple groceries. It was like we used to call a "roadside stand." And we'd sell soft drinks and whatever else could be kept: a minimal amount of staple groceries, coffee, sugar--pick-up stuff. But one of us had to sleep there all the time. We had to have somebody sleeping there.

GARDNER: Why was that?

EPSTEIN: Well, because otherwise they would carry the whole damned store away. [laughter] It was a little bit of a shack; you could break in.

GARDNER: What was that neighborhood like at the time?

EPSTEIN: It was beginning to build up. There was some community beginning to build up. It was still considered semirural, but it was building up very rapidly. The new subdivisions had gone even beyond that, and that was sort of a little oasis in between. We had that for a few months, and then we decided to give it up. It was too uncomfortable. And the people there were noneducated people. So we sold it to someone else.

Then again my brother went to work at a produce plant, and then he got sick again. At any rate, it was up to me to find something else to do. A friend of ours knew some people who had market experience. And they said, well, they needed someone to help them. They wanted to buy a grocery department in a market. But they needed more help than they could afford to give it, and would I be a partner. Which sounded all right, sounded interesting, sounded like a challenge. The amount of money was something like $1100, $1200. My dad loaned it to me, and I went in with those people. And I became very ambitious and I liked to do business.

GARDNER: Where was this one?

EPSTEIN: It was on Whittier Boulevard not too far from Kaspare Cohn Hospital. Kaspare Cohn was about three blocks east of that. So we went in business. There was a small apartment in back of that store where my partner lived with his wife and child. He was an easygoing guy. I got overly ambitious, and I was doing the buying and selling and delivering. I learned business very rapidly. But I found out that they were taking merchandise from the store and, number one, not only supporting their own family with it but giving it to other members of their family; number two, that every time his wife came into the store to help, our register was always short around twenty dollars; number three, I was

working too hard. See, my family was still living near Western Avenue, and I was commuting back and forth, early in the morning, late at night. And I got a very bad cold and I couldn't get rid of it. It started getting worse, and I could feel myself slipping. I knew that I was going to crack. I just knew it. And I was becoming very unhappy with the treatment I was getting from this couple. So I told them, "Either you buy me out or I'll buy you out. This partnership can't go on." Well, they didn't want to sell out, because they had a good thing. It was not a bad business, and it was showing a profit. I said, "I don't want any more of this partnership. I'm not happy. I'm afraid these things are happening. I can't prove it, and I don't want to prove it." So they offered me $500 less than I'd put in. I said, "I'll give you that deal." Well, they didn't want to give it up. I said, "Well, then, why do you want me to take a deal like that?" So I gave them an ultimatum. "If you don't make up your mind within three days, over the weekend, I will call the agent who sold us this and I will sign a paper which will bind us all to sell it, whatever price. Now it's up to you." So they decided to pay me off, and I got a couple of hundred dollars in addition. I insisted that I wanted that, because it was a good deal for them. So they bought me out.

And you know, within a week I just--pffft--right out

like a light. I cracked. And what with two TBs in the family, everybody in the family thought that I had TB also, and there was great consternation. The doctor who attended the others, Dr. [Francis M.] Pottenger--a very famous man; he had a sanatorium in Monrovia--became my doctor. He never told me that I had TB, and he never told me that I didn't have TB. We just all assumed that. I had a spot on my lung. What I had was a very bad case of pleurisy. And to this day I have a spot on my lung like that. Every time I go for an examination where they take X rays of my chest I tell them beforehand, "Now, look, don't be alarmed. There's a spot on my left lung, very large; it's been there for over forty years."

An incident happened in Palo Alto. We went there for a checkup, and they took an X ray, and we went about our business, my wife and I. And I got back to the hospital for the final checkup, and they said, "Where have you been? We've looked all over for you, spent a whole day trying to chase you down." "What's wrong?" "Well, we want some more X rays of your chest." I said, "Uh-oh. I know what that is." So I told the doctor. Well, he was greatly relieved. He said, "Well, let me take another picture anyway." That's an aside.

Well, from that step, the next step is the book business, where this all starts.

GARDNER: And at this point your family is living in Boyle Heights?

EPSTEIN: At that point they were not yet in Boyle Heights. [tape stopped] We were just north of Santa Barbara. I don't recollect the number; I think it's something like 3900.

GARDNER: What was your father doing at this time, then?

EPSTEIN: Well, as I said, he was just looking around, getting the lay of the land. He met this man who was running a business not quite like the kind he ran, so he made a few deals with him. They were going to stay partners, but the man wasn't good enough for my father. He wasn't as good a businessman, and he didn't know his merchandise as well. And he wasn't liked by the people he'd deal with. The one thing I will say about my father: the people who dealt with him always liked him. His business depended on source and supply, the same as the old-book business, in a sense. If you get the merchandise at the right price, you can sell it.

Now, if you'll allow me to digress, to jump about forty years from the time I'm speaking of, if that's all right with you, I'll tell the story.

GARDNER: That's fine, go ahead.

EPSTIEN: When we moved to Hollywood, when we opened the Pickwick, we were still in the old-book business. Pickwick was supposed to be an old-book store. It was. But pocket

books had just come out. And one of the salesmen whom we knew came in and wanted to sell me a bunch of new pocket books. And the chief title was Dale Carnegie's How to Win Friends and Influence People--which really started off the pocket book business. If that had failed, pocket books would have failed. I'm sure the idea would have been started again, but the company would have failed. I didn't want them. Well, anyway, he finally persuaded me, "You're on Hollywood Boulevard; you're no longer on Eighth Street downtown; it's a different area. And you'll sell them." And there were a few other titles. So he said, "In order to get 40 percent, you've got to buy 1,000 books." "What do I want with 1,000 books?" "You'll sell them, believe me. If you don't sell them, I'll take them back." Well, against my will, I decided, "Okay, I'll try it." So we had a rack made. But he said, "You'll have to establish credit with the company that sells these books." "Who are they?" "The Sunset News Company." Still in business. They sold out to ARA [American Retailers Association] a few years ago. "And you'll talk to Mr. [Johiel] Katzev." The name Katzev. I said, "Katzev, Katzev." I asked the salesman, "Was he ever in the dress manufacturing business?" He said, "Yes." I said, "My father must know him, because I've heard my father mention that name." So I called Mr. Katzev at Sunset News. And I said, "Harry Smith here sold me 1,000 books and he

says I have to establish credit with you. I have no credit because I'm in the old-book business and everything we buy is for cash. I can give you the name of the bank we deal with, and so forth." He said, "What is your name?" I repeated my name. He said, "What's your name again?" I repeated my name, "Louis Epstein." He said, "Are you related to R. Epstein of the Ohio Jobbing Company?" I said, "That's my father." He said, "You can have any amount of credit you want. I don't have to ask you any more questions." And I thought that was a very, very touching thing. And I repeated that story many years later to Mr. Katzev's son, who now calls himself [Arthur] Kates. And I've seen Mr. Katzev any number of times since. I did a lot of business with Sunset News in later years. It was always a very touching story. He said, "If you are his son, have anything you want. Come, take anything you want. Don't worry about it." I'm R. Epstein's son; I don't worry about it. [laughter]

That's the relationship he established with people he dealt with. He had many competitors in that type of business who would go around to shops looking. But most of the people he dealt with, he dealt with the bigger ones and the better ones who handled a better type of merchandise. And once he got started with them, they wouldn't see to anybody else. He was a pleasure to do business with, and they trusted him.

Mr. Katzev tells a story: He would never measure a bolt of merchandise. He would take it like this and feel it. And he would say, "You've got thirty yards in that." And he said, "We tested him out, and he never missed by one or two yards up or down." and he said, "If he gave us a price, we knew it was a fair price. We might get a little more maybe sometime from somebody else. Maybe he wasn't always highest, and maybe he wasn't always lowest, but he always gave us a decent price for what it was worth." So they would either call him again and again, or they'd save stuff for him. But this is in relation to later, when I got in the book business, how it's interrelated. The reputation he made helped me.

GARDNER: Well, as the side runs out, I guess we can start with the story of how you became a bookman, since that's the crucial part of the oral history.

EPSTEIN: Yes. That stems back from the grocery business, where I told you I had collapsed. For weeks and weeks and weeks I was flat on my back, everybody assuming I had TB, although the doctor never said that. And he never told me. Then I began to feel better. My strength started coming back, and I began to move around and go downtown. I'd go into bookstores, look around. I had nothing else to do; I wasn't capable of working yet. So I started browsing in a few stores, buying a book occasionally.

GARDNER: Which stores?

EPSTEIN: Well, there was Holmes; there was Powner. I sneaked into Parker's once. Parker was the leading new-book seller, a very austere person. I went to Fowler's--well, all of them who were in existence at that time. I went to Dawson's on Grand Avenue. There were a few others on Sixth Street, Lofland and Russell; and Powner's was on Spring Street. And there were a few others. I have them all jotted down here somewhere. I'd always liked books, but in the general sort of way, like the average person who was a customer of mine in later years. He's not too bookish, but he wants to read a book once in a while, good or bad, whatever it happens to be, if he likes it, he likes it.

Then constantly my strength kept coming back, and there came a period of time when I said, "Look, what am I going to do now?" I didn't want to go back to school, and I didn't have any business, didn't have any trade. So one day I was reading--and I kept watching the want ads, the business for sale--I saw an ad in the Times, "Bookstore for sale, Long Beach." It gave the address on Pine Avenue, six hundred and something. Well, I had nothing else to do that day; I went down there. I had never been to Long Beach in all the time I'd been here. So I got a Red Car and went down to Long Beach, all the way down to the end of the line, and took a walk along the Long Beach Pike, as we used to call it then. Then I walked back up Pine Avenue to the address of

the store, and I went in there. It was a smallish store. Half of it was the little bookstore and half of it was a gunsmith-and-locksmith's shop. The place had mostly secondhand magazines, a few Western stories. But it was a bookstore. Today probably if anybody would call me and offer to give it to me, I probably wouldn't take it. But I didn't know any better. And I got to talking with the man, a German chap.

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GARDNER: Okay, to conclude the story of your purchase.

EPSTEIN: I talked to the man, and he told me how I couldn't possibly fail. If he could do it with no education to speak of, and he was German and all that. . . . He gave me all the difficulties he had and still made a living; with all the things that I knew, I could do nothing but become a wealthy man. So he found out I could raise $700, and that was the price of the store. It was interesting--it sounded interesting--so I bought it. By that time, the folks had already moved to Boyle Heights. I was still living with the family, and I could stall off my board and room for a while.

So I bought it, and he told me how to run the business, what to do; but this is still a peculiar setup. "And who watches when you have to go out? Mr. Schuberg?" He was named [Bill] Shuman; the other was Schuberg. "So Schuberg'll watch the store. He introduced Mr. Schuberg. "Oh, we'll have no problem." And then he said, "If anybody wants to buy something, he probably knew the value of something, and most of the stuff is marked." A lot of magazines--National Geographics and whatnot.

Anyway, I bought it and moved into a room in Long Beach, and had my meals at dirty little restaurants. And I enjoyed

it. I enjoyed this sense: the buying and the running around chasing the books--which I did little of, because, number one, I didn't know where. He told me where he went. But one thing he told me: he said, "You'll get calls to buy books. Don't ever pay more than ten cents for a book." And you know, I lost an awful lot of good books because I wouldn't offer over ten cents. [laughter] It took me a little while to find out that that formula was wrong. A lot of the stuff came from the Salvation Army, Goodwill; we'd buy magazines. The turnover in magazines made a living. The business was as good as he told me it was, and it was worth the money I paid. But after five or six months, I became awfully tired of the community. Number one, my living conditions were far from ideal. I lived in a room, and I'd eat all my meals out.

GARDNER: It was a rooming house sort of setup?

EPSTEIN: A rooming house a couple blocks away, and all my meals out; I got awfully tired of that. And then commuting weekends: Saturday evening I would take the Red Car and then come back Monday morning.

GARDNER: What was Long Beach like in those days?

EPSTEIN: Long Beach was a well-established community in those days. But it had the reputation [as]--and it was--a community of retired farmers from the Middle West, mostly Iowa and Indiana. Their main interest was the price of hogs on any given day. Their reading habits were--I'll tell

you, they were not very good. And to show you the type of community (I was very fortunate I made up my mind to leave there, because if I'd stayed there, I never would have made a decent bookman): I was there for six months, and even the person who sold out to me didn't know, and nobody in the community indicated to me, that there was such a thing as a Publisher's Weekly, or any other kind of trade paper. That's how ignorant I was, and that's how ignorant the community was. Usually here in Hollywood, the customers tell you that there is such a thing, or a librarian walks in to discuss something. But there it was sort of an arid place. And Long Beach still is not a good book town, although I think it's ripe for a good bookstore. I think I told you the time after we sold the Pickwick, I mentioned to them that Long Beach should be watched. Well, Pickwick does have a store at Lakewood, which is just outside, that does very well.

At any rate, to get back to that, after six months I sold out to a Scotchman named A.D. Castle who was very happy with it; kept it for years, till he finally got sick and had to give it up. But he was very happy to get it; it was just the thing he was looking for. But he moved a year after. Our store was right across the street from the Long Beach Press-Telegram, if you happen to know where it is. The site is now occupied by a Thrifty [Drug] Store.

Of course, the old building we were in was an old shack of a building. There was a row of about ten little tiny stores, and ours was the third from the corner. They tore them all down.

GARDNER: Were there any other bookstores in Long Beach at the time?

EPSTEIN: Yes, there was. There was Hewitt's. Hewitt's Bookstore was the new-book store there; they sold stationery and books. There was one other chap who was just as ignorant as I who was selling secondhand books and magazines. In those days, novels used to sell because there were no pocket books. But paperbacks have killed the market for old novels. If you ran across a few good novels--and I must have run across some good things. You couldn't possibly not have run across them. A dealer would occasionally drift in from Los Angeles and go through my shelves and pick up a few things. I always used to listen to them, but they worked very quickly, and I never got really acquainted with them. I later became acquainted with them when I opened in town.

I sold out, and then by that time the spirit of the chase had developed. I started going around looking at bookstores with a different sort of an eye. And I found out there was such a thing as a Publisher's Weekly when I moved back to Los Angeles. And I saw a copy one day, on one

of the dealers' desks, of Publisher's Weekly. I looked at it, and then I asked him, "Can anyone subscribe to that?" He says, "Well, I don't see why not." Then I told him I had a little bookstore in Long Beach. "Oh," he said, "Long Beach. That's no place for a bookstore." He was right.

And I kept going around, and I picked up the things that I knew. I picked up Western stories and mystery stories and the better magazines. Pretty soon I had quite a few in the garage, and why not open a store in Los Angeles? I didn't do badly in the way of business. I did as much as I expected to do and made as much profit as I expected to, so it wasn't a failure in that sense. It was a failure in the essentials of living, you might say, somebody to talk to and then someone to relate to in the community. There was nobody there, no point to staying there.

Gradually I started looking around; I gradually became acquainted with a few of the booksellers--not too well. I finally decided I would open a store. I had to borrow a few bucks. So I rented a store, 10 feet X 40, on West Sixth Street, right around the corner from the Biola Institute, right around the corner from the [L.A. Public] Library. The building is now torn down, that big narrow building they built. It had a wide expanse on Sixth Street but no depth. The lot was 50 feet deep and [had a] 10-foot little

space in the back of the store which we couldn't use; so it was 10 feet X 40 feet. I rented that in 1926, the spring of '26. My brother-in-law was a carpenter; he helped me build a few shelves. For part of the shelves we used apple boxes. And then I later became acquainted with somebody who lived at the Biola; and I gave him a few bucks, and he built me some more shelves and got rid of the apple boxes. I gave him some books. And I really began to learn the book business. Dawson's was a block away; Powner's was on Spring Street; Lofland and Russell was across the street on the next block. Directly across the street was Rogers, who was a brother-in-law of Dawson's.

Book people started coming in. I just got my foot into the book world. And they would discuss things. I found out what a first edition was supposed to be. [N.C.] Holmes had his main store on Sixth Street near Figueroa in those days. Well, Holmes at that time had about six, seven stores operating in the city. He used to come in. He used to go to lunch on Hill Street and walk by; and I learned from him because he would stop and look at my stock every day. And anytime Holmes bought a book, I knew I had it marked too cheap--or any other dealer, for that matter. But I made no complaints. I mean, I bought it cheap enough, so I made my profit. But you learn, you talk, and you listen; and then I started going around looking at

their shelves.

Mr. [Ernest] Dawson, God bless his memory, came over during the first week I was there. I had a little narrow rack I put on the sidewalk against the wall, and I had books marked ten cents, fifteen cents, twenty-five cents, thirty-five cents, whatever I felt it was worth. He came to me and introduced himself. (Now, there's a man who was the bookman in the city in those days, rare-book man. But he was nice enough to come and introduce himself, offer me help.) He said, "If you don't mind, young man"--I was all of twenty-four; in '26 I was twenty-four years old--"if you don't mind me telling you something, that rack of books you have out there, if you would make them all one price and put a little sign on them at that price, you would sell more." As simple a thing as that. Of course, it was true. And I did it, and it came out true. And he said, "If they don't sell at that price, reduce them." That's the way he operated. He gave me that advice. And I always remembered that.

Holmes was a different kind of character--he wouldn't help you. But occasionally he let an idea slip through. I said to Mr. Holmes--I still referred to him as Mr. Holmes (well, he was so much older than I; they were all older than I)--"How do you develop a good trade? How could my business grow?" He said, "Do exactly what you're doing; buy the best

books you can to your best knowledge." I said, "What kind of books shall I buy?" He said, "Good books on any subject. One day you'll sell one off of here, another one off of there, another one off of there," pointing. "At the end of the day, you'll have a few dollars in the till." You know, that's exactly the way it was. He said, "It's not what you yourself like. The man on the street comes in. . . ."

And I began to make friends. The younger generation of booksellers would stop in and talk to me. Some of them would ridicule me because I was so totally ignorant. One of them told me the year after I'd been established--John Friend; he was working for Dawson. After I'd been open for a year, he came in one day--on his lunch hour, he used to come in--and he said, "Louis, I don't know how you made it. You started with nothing, you didn't know a damned thing, and you had no stock. And here you are a year later. You have a little bit of stock, and you apparently made a living. I don't know how you did it." I told him I was just as amazed as he was, knowing now how ignorant I was then. So that was the reaction. Charlie Yale, who used to be Dawson's manager--a very fine man who later owned his own bookstore. He lived in Pasadena, so when he retired from Dawson's he started up his own store. And I watched the Dawson boys grow up. Then I became, gradually, a member of their community, and I began to go out looking for books and competing with them. After a few years I feel that when we were competing for

somebody's library, that I got my share of them as well as they did.

GARDNER: These were almost all secondhand stores.

EPSTEIN: Oh, yes, these were all secondhand-book stores.

GARDNER: What was the situation like in new books?

EPSTEIN: In new books? The new-book stores downtown at that time were Fowler's--they were on Broadway near Eighth Street; and I told you about Parker, on Sixth Street. Jones was on the way out. There was another outfit that was on the way out, Stratford and Greene. [tape stopped] One of them was actually being auctioned off, and Jones a year later went out. Stratford and Greene was being sold out on Hill Street. As a matter of fact, the first book I ever went out looking for, for anybody, I had a chap come in the store, and he said, "Have you got a copy of Ades and Jasapovicha?" Those were the two authors; they were Arabs. Now, this I remember because it's important to me. The name of the book was Goha the Fool. I said, "No, I don't have it, but I think I can get it for you. Can you wait till tomorrow?" He said, "Yes. No hurry." The customer's name was Verne Fiske. He was an interior decorator--later had his own business. It's a long story. So I remembered I'd been in Stratford and Greene, and they had two copies of that book on the shelf. And they'd been reduced to something like thirty-five cents. So due to the fact that he wanted one, I rushed over the

next morning and bought both of them. That was the first specific request that I went to search out. And I'll never forget it.

So I bought it for him. The man came in the next day, and he said, "Gee, how did you find it so soon." Well, I told him I happened to know where I'd seen it. He said, "You've got a good memory." Well, that was all I needed, something like that. And that man, Verne Fiske, remained a customer of mine when I moved to Eighth Street, when I moved to Hollywood, and he died just about three years ago. He had an account with me. He was an interior decorator. But I'll never forget it. And I often told him about it after we came to Hollywood. By that time we'd become friends, not only customers. I got a big kick out of that. Oh, I rushed over, and I found it. So to get back to the new-book sellers that were there then--there weren't very many downtown. Those were the two active ones and the two dying ones. One was already in the process of being buried, and the other I think the following year--Jones went the following year. All the department stores had good book departments then.

GARDNER: It's interesting that there was so much trade in secondhand books that made it possible for so many shops to exist.

EPSTEIN: Well, they were all concentrated on Sixth Street.

There were some on Spring Street. As I mentioned, Holmes had about six or seven stores at the time, scattered. He had one on Main Street, and I think two on Spring Street--or maybe three on Spring Street. He used to rent a store that was empty and run it until the landlord leased it out to someone. And he'd auction books, too. They had an auctioneer, Charles Nash, and they would buy remainder sets and other kinds of remainders and auction them off. But Jake Zeitlin hadn't started yet. Mel Royer at that time was a customer of mine, and Max Hunley was a customer of mine before he started in the book business. Jake, at that time, was working at Bullock's in the book department. They all used to come in, and I was young, and I guess they picked up a bargain every so often because of my ignorance--which was all right. But the book talk I heard and the things that I. . . . I learned that there were books about books and reference catalogs and everything else, which was a whole new world to me.

I think the book trade was very good to me, very friendly to me. They weren't to each other, often. There were some that would never talk to each other. And the most unfriendly one of all was Holmes. He was a very jealous man. When you would compete with him on a library--you know, someone would call us, several dealers--Holmes would pull every kind of trick you could imagine. He would come in

and say, "I'll give you ten dollars more than anybody else gave you, regardless." Or he would go out and make a bid, and then send another one of his employees to the same place and say he's from another store and bid ten dollars higher. That's the kind of stuff he did. Oh, he was vicious. But he got no happiness out of it. He finally had a great deal of trouble. He was very distant from his family. He actually went off his rocker at the end. And he's a brother to Harold Holmes up in San Francisco, the Holmes Book Company there.

GARDNER: Did any of these dealers specialize?

EPSTEIN: They were beginning to become specialists. The specialization hadn't come up to the extent that it came up later.

GARDNER: Was there any specific area that you, for example, began to specialize in?

EPSTEIN: Anything I could get hold of. Mine always was a general-book store. I didn't specialize in one specific thing. If I could find a decent book on any subject, I don't care what it was. And that's the same policy we pursued in Pickwick after we grew up. Ours was not a specialty store. We sold every kind of book that we thought the community would buy. Some people later went into first editions and all that sort of thing, but when I was in the old-book business I sold first editions and

I sold every other kind of an edition. I sold sets and whatever else. Later we sold lots and lots of books to libraries, which is another area of sales which would be interesting. We had libraries around here; we sold to the city library.

But the booksellers were between Eighth Street and Sixth Street. There were some on Hill Street up north of Fifth, and Walker was way up on Main Street. There were a couple of smaller ones on Main Street, a few left over.

GARDNER: Was the shop just called Louis Epstein?

EPSTEIN: The first one on Sixth Street, I thought I'd be very, very clever. Everyone has read Longfellow's Hiawatha, and everyone would know about Acadia. So I named my shop the Acadia Bookshop. Well, it was a disaster as far as the name was concerned. Nobody said "Acadia"; everybody said "acacia." Number one, there was a Hotel Acacia across the street. And especially people who were Masons--acacia is some name of a degree. But nobody seemed to know Acadia. Here I thought I'd picked a beautiful name. But that didn't particularly bother me.

The main thing, though, was the response I got from the other people, what they taught me and what I learned from them by looking through their stocks, by looking through their shelves, and the kind of books they bought

from me, and the kinds of books that I got calls for. And by that time all the collectors, if they'd go to one shop, they would come to the others. You never know where you'll find a book. A man would come in and pick up a sleeper from me or whatever, and we sold religious books and occult books and all kinds of things.

And being right around the corner from the Biola College, I had no fewer than a dozen Biola students a day walking in and wanting to save my soul. [laughter] Really funny. They used to come in, "Have you been saved, brother?" I'd say, "Well, I feel I'm safe. Saved and safe." They'd say, "Well, have you taken up Christ?" I'd say, "No, I haven't. I don't think I'm going to." I told them I was Jewish, there was no reason--well, you know, they gave you the pitch. But every time they got a new group of students they started right out going around the area to save us. But they were nice boys. A couple of them I had do work for me. One of them I employed part time for a while, but I said, "Now, look, one thing you've got to do. I'll employ you only on one condition. While you're here in the store, you talk religion to nobody. And you proselyte nobody. And leave me alone, too. And we'll get along beautifully. I'll try to help you, but I want you to help me in my business." He was a nice boy. I don't think he stayed with it too long.

GARDNER: Were there any special merchandising techniques that anyone used at that point?

EPSTEIN: I had no merchandising techniques, except just put out what you're got and stack them up.

GARDNER: So really, in the purest sense, all of the bookstores were strictly bookstores. There was nothing but the books to show.

EPSTEIN: Well, there were bookstores that sold gifts.

GARDNER: No, I mean in that little group that you were in there.

EPSTEIN: On, no, the old-book people? No, they would sell magazines, art magazines you run across once in a while--International Studio (I don't know if you remember that magazine) and whatever art magazines. Of course, there were better magazines and lesser magazines. Mysteries and Western stories always. . . . They provided the base of income. Not that you wanted to sell magazines particularly; but, number one, I didn't know any better but it provided me a base of income until I built up the business to the point where I found that, well, why bother with magazines when I can use this space for books? And I was getting enough income in books where I was able to find enough books. You could always go to the Goodwill Store and buy magazines. Books were a little harder to find. But until I got to the point where I had enough books coming in--or

until I learned how to get books and what books to get--the magazines were certainly a lot easier to learn about. And they were easy to sell. And the investment was very small. You got along with very little money. You could make $10 a day some days, just out of your magazines. In those days $10 was $300 a month. That's a hell of a lot of dough. It was a while before I made that kind of money. If I had had a family, I'm not sure that I would have made it. But my expenses were nil.

GARDNER: This is now 1926, -7, -8--that period in there, right?

EPSTEIN: It was '26, -7, and -8, that's about that period. Within a year I had a fairly decent stock made up. It was amazing. And it was amazing, too, that people would come to sell me books. Now, why would they come to me? Why would they come to me when there's Dawson's, there was Lofland, these guys. I've often wondered why they did that. Maybe because they thought, "Well, the poor guy needs it more." [laughter] But then I would get calls--of course, I started running a little ad for buying books.

GARDNER: Where did you run the ads?

EPSTEIN: In the Times, a little ad in the Times. Not in the display--in the want ad section. And I used to get calls. I used to go around to furniture dealers, auctioneers, and storage houses. Oh, I learned a lot from auctioneers

and storage people. My brother and I used to go to auctions. Ben used to hang around the store when he was well and he wasn't away. First I went to auctions. I was the first one an auctioneer learned from that a book was worth more than a nickel. The first few times I ever went to auctions where they sold books, the minute you bid a nickel, "Sold." Later on, I guess, one of them started, "Well, if this guy bids a nickel all the time, maybe he'll bid six cents." So he pulled a bid out of the air, "Six," and I said, "Seven." I never bought a book for a nickel again. [laughter]

GARDNER: Where were some of these auctions held?

EPSTEIN: Well, the auctioneers were pretty well scattered. They were on Western Avenue, Sixth Street, Adams Boulevard. The fancier ones--there was one on Wilshire Boulevard. Oh, those auctioneers were a great lot. You ought to go to some auctioneer and do a study like this.

GARDNER: Who are some of the ones who are still around who were auctioneering then?

EPSTEIN: There aren't any still around.

GARDNER: All switched, huh?

EPSTEIN: The only one is Abell. The old man is much older than I am, and I'm seventy-three. I'll have to stop and visit him. He still comes to work. We used to get along. I used to buy a lot of books from him. Very clever operator.

And then with him was O'Connor. An old-timer here would now the O'Connor name. There was the father, C.H., and then there was Bill and Frank. They're all gone now. I don't know, Frank may still be alive, but he's been out of the auction business for years. There was [Albert] Weil; there was Feldman. I'm talking about the very early ones. Colonel Jenkins is still around, but I never dealt much with Colonel Jenkins. My brother used to when he was in business. I don't know; they came and went. But those were the principal ones. Ames, Goldenberg. . . .

GARDNER: Ames is still around, I think.

EPSTEIN: Ames, yes, but this is about the third generation. But he was a latecomer. They came out from Duluth, Minnesota. They had been in the merchandising business, and they came out with a good deal of money. Some auctioneer or furniture buyer ran across a beautiful home of furniture and didn't have the money. So he went to Ames to back him, and Ames backed him. And he did that a couple of times, and he decided to open an auction house. The way they operated is that they didn't buy all the furniture themselves, and a lot of it was put up for auction by the people who owned the furniture. But more than half of it was furniture that was bought by dealers who had put it up for auction, and they would split the profit. The auctioneer would furnish the finances. In other words, if you were the auctioneer and I was a furniture

dealer, and I would come across a beautiful home with about $50,000 worth of furniture--I didn't have $50,000, but you did. Okay, you give me the money, I buy it, we put it into your auction house, and we split the profit. Abell still does that. Curtis was the auctioneer, Paul Curtis. I did a great deal of business with him.

Oh, I could tell you a lot of tricks those auctioneers used to play. They would buy a home and maybe have a minimal amount of furniture. They would furnish the home, put furniture into it. The shelves were empty; they'd put books into to them. They'd say, "Louis, we need 100 feet of sets," or maybe 500 miscellaneous books, and maybe 100 feet of sets, various kinds of sets, 500 or 1,000 miscellaneous books, for a very fine home. Okay. So I would get it and bill it to them, and they'd put it on the shelf and sell it as part of the contents of the house. So people would think that these were the furniture and the things that the owner of that house had lived with. Well, maybe a little bit of it was. But I would always bill them the stuff. And if they didn't sell everything I sent out to them, they'd call me up, and I'd credit it back to them, and they'd pay me the difference. I don't know whether my conscience should bother me for that or not, but I always billed them.

That was what they used to call "stuffing." It was generally done. Somewhat it may still be done. They buy

a name. They bought C.C. Julian's home. C.C. Julian, I don't think you would remember. He was a promoter of oil and things like that. Anyway, like a good many other people, during the Depression he went broke. He had a house up here in the Beachwood area, a beautiful big home. And they took that house, the C.C. Julian house, and whatever there was left of C.C. Julian's estate, and they furnished it almost completely. They ran great big ads, "C.C. Julian's house," and so forth and so forth. And I don't think one-tenth of the material there had ever been seen by C.C. Julian, including the books. But it was one of the ways you had to make a living. Then by that time I was doing fairly well. It was during the Depression. And compared to a lot of the other people, we were doing relatively well. I helped support parts of my family and my friends.

GARDNER: Let's get the family part more or less up to date. You got married in 1929, right? So previous to that, what was Ben doing at this point?

EPSTEIN: Ben was in and out of sanatoria. By the time Ben got interested in books, in the book business. . . . In native intelligence, Ben is the most intelligent in the family. But he didn't use it. He was undisciplined in the sense that he didn't want to follow a course. But he fell in love with the book business. He got out of the sanatorium--it must have been around 1929. It was after I was on Eighth

Street. He used to come in on Sixth Street once in a while. But on Eighth Street it must have been around 1931 or -2. He got out of the sanatorium, and he had to watch his energy. He had no job, so he used to come and hang around the Eighth Street store. And he used to watch me buy and sell. Sometimes we'd go out, and when I'd have to go see a library I'd take him along for the ride. He'd go in with me and help me or whatever he could. He became enamored with it. See, Ben's a gambler, and this was enough of a gambling thing, with the chase in it, that it intrigued him immensely. So one day we got a call, and he said, "Let me go make that call myself." So I said, "Well, how are you going to carry the books out if you buy?" He said, "If it's a lot, I'll call you, or I'll get somebody to help me." Well, he went out, and for about ninety-five dollars he brought in one of the best buys that you could possibly bring--sets of various kinds and independent volumes. And to this day he boasts about that buy, the best buy, the first buy. And you know, from that time on he was so hooked on the book business. Later on I opened a store that he himself ran--which I owned, but he ran completely.

GARDNER: That was the Argonaut [Book Store].

EPSTEIN: The Argonaut. So that's how he got interested in the book business. But our family life, to go back to that period: well, I spent most of my time either working at the

bookstore or sometimes in the evening I would go out looking at books. I'd go out socially from time to time. And family affairs and whatnot and whatnot. There was not a great social life. But I met a lot of people during the course of the day, and very often I would go out with them weekends or Sundays.

GARDNER: Were you involved at all in Jewish life in Los Angeles?

EPSTEIN: At that time, not particularly.

GARDNER: Were you conscious of what it was like?

EPSTEIN: Oh, I was always aware; oh, yes, I kept up with what was going on. But I wasn't particularly religious then, nor am I overly religious now. In the sense that I support Jewish things. I support the Jewish religion.

GARDNER: What was the community like in those days?

EPSTEIN: Well, they had a very highly organized Jewish community. There were the old-timers who had, of course, the Federation as far as organizations. You read the Newmark books and some of the others, and you'll find that they had a very--especially the early Jewish settlers were just one great big close-knit clan. And then the Russian Jews came in later. They weren't accepted too well at first; but they made their way and they made their mark, and they were later accepted. There wasn't as much mixture then between the two groups as there is now. Now the lines are

almost broken. There was the Sephardic group, which didn't mix with either. The Sephardi always stayed to themselves. I think the Sephardi are still the most clannish. They still mix hardly at all with the others. They don't want their daughters marrying a non-Sephardi. They still arrange, as best they can, marriages where they can.

They had a Jewish Home for the Aged at that time; they had Kaspare Cohn Hospital, which later became Cedars of Lebanon Hospital and later on became Cedars-Sinai. The City of Hope was then called the Jewish Consumptive Relief Association of Los Angeles. That was getting on its feet already. They had that piece of land where they are now, or a good bit of it. They had a Jewish newspaper, the B'Nai B'Rith Messenger. There was organized community life. There were the synagogues--all kinds of them. The Temple Sinai was over at Fourth and New Hampshire, not where it is now. I remember Temple Sinai. Near Fourth, in that area. And the Breed Street Shul, of course. And Adams Street was a Jewish community. And before Adams, of course, I forgot about Olive Street and Temple Street--the Olive Street Synagogue. As a matter of fact, my parents are buried in the cemetery that was owned by the Olive Street Shul. Downey Road, near Olympic, just west of where the Home of Peace cemetery is. My parents are buried there. That particular cemetery, there are about four Jewish cemeteries together.

Each synagogue had a different one. Now, of course, Temple Israel has the one called Hillside Park near Westchester, near Sepulveda [Boulevard] and Centinela [Avenue]. So the community was organized, and the second generation was coming up. Of course, for the old-timers it was the third or fourth generation, like the Newmarks and the Cohns and the Lewises. They were bringing up the third and fourth California generation. But by that time the second generation of the later immigrants came in. And they began to go into the professions. They built up businesses, which are now very large, big businesses. The Berg brothers, Berg Metals. They were a group of brothers who went into the junk business. They're smart, they're nice people, and they did extremely well. They'll all foreign-born. Oh, I don't know; if I put my mind to it I can run you off a list.

GARDNER: But you didn't participate in this community in any way.

EPSTEIN: Not especially in those days. It was later on that I became involved in. . . . I was always a contributor, a minor one, even when we had nothing. But as an actual participant in joining organizations and going to meetings--I never cared for that a great deal. And the only time I did it a great deal was during the time when the Jewish question became worldwide in Hitler's era; and when I was able to do something with money and with time, then I really

gave a tremendous amount of time to the Welfare Fund drives.

GARDNER: Well, we'll come up to that later. How did you meet your wife?

EPSTEIN: Well, she met me. We had a mutual friend who told her [about me]. She met him here, and then she met him again in Chicago, and he said, "Well, when you go to Los Angeles again, you stop in and see Louis Epstein. He has a bookstore." I had that little tiny bookstore, and she came in. She introduced herself and told me that Sid Diamond said to come in and say hello. She was a nice girl. She came in again and bought a book. I don't know whether she needed a book or not. [laughter] Then things went on, we began going out, and from there on the romance developed. We didn't marry till 1929, October.

GARDNER: When had you first met?

EPSTEIN: Not too long after I opened my first shop. I think it was the latter part of '26.

GARDNER: When did you move to Eighth Street?

EPSTEIN: I was going along nicely on Sixth Street, and I was there about a year and a half. And a chap by the name of Ralph Howey, who'd just graduated college--some eastern school--came in with his brother, I remember that, and looked around. He had been in a couple of times before, looking around. He said, "Would you like to sell your store?" I said, "I hadn't thought of it, but I might." I was still

single. It was a year and a half or something, running it all by myself. So he said, "How much would you want for it if you did sell it?" I said, "I think it's worth at least $2,500." So they came back the next day and said, "We'll give you $2,250." And I took it, just like that. I was a wealthy man--paid off my debts, I had money jingling in my pocket. But I didn't know what I was going to do. I thought, "Well, I'll get into something. After all, I've got dough." [laughter]

He was very happy with what he got, a very nice man. But he changed the business completely from a real secondhand bookstore. He specialized in pamphlet material. He might just as well have been anywhere else instead of the bookstore. But I think he needed a transition period. And he later on moved to Philadelphia and he became a specialist in pamphlets. He did very well. I recently heard from him. He is doing very well.

GARDNER: What sort of pamphlets?

EPSTEIN: Early pamphlets on early religion, early politics--British pamphlets. His main business was with libraries. There's a big market for it, you know; it's all source material. This is an example of how specialized the old-book business can become.

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GARDNER: You had just sold the store to Mr. Howey.

EPSTEIN: Yes. And there I had $2,250 in good money and paid off the $200 that I owed my dad--I'm not even sure that I even owed him any more money at that time. But at any rate, I bummed around for a number of months. I went up to San Francisco. I drove up there in a little old car I had, and all along the way I would stop and look for books. I found a few. In San Francisco, of course, I visited all the bookstores, the name stores like Paul Elder. I visited department stores, which had good book departments in those days. And John Newbegin's store. I talked to all of them, introduced myself, and they were very cordial. And they were all big names in my mind. And meeting them was like, gee, meeting a very senior person in my industry or, if you want to call it, profession. And I'd always heard of them and the things they had done.

That was one of the enjoyments of the trip, and I picked up quite a few books. I would continue to do that wherever I went. On the way back, I went to San Jose and Sacramento, where I'd never been, stopped at Bakersfield, and had myself a decent time. When I got back to Los Angeles, I started looking around for books, went to the auction houses and

storage houses and became more acquainted with them, made some nice contacts and picked up some books from them. First thing I knew, I had a nucleus of a few hundred books, good books, to put on the shelf if I wanted to start in business again. Of course, I immediately began thinking of starting in business.

In the meantine, Jake Zeitlin was opening his first shop. I kept seeing Jake over the interim. We'd meet in the bookstore or wherever. We'd talk. I told him I had these books. He said, "Look, I'm starting my shop, and I need some books to help fill my shelves." "Well," I said, "I will let you put my books on your shelf, but I am going to open a bookstore of my own before too many months, and I will want my books back, those that you haven't sold." "Okay, it's a deal." So we listed all the things, and he put them on the shelf. He had a little tiny store on Hope Street, just around the corner from Sixth. It was hardly bigger than the entrance to this house. So this went on, and he sold a few.

But about five months after I let him have these books, I rented a store on West Eighth Street. I got tired of just floating. I found a chap who'd been a customer of mine, Dick Shelton. He was older than I was, and he had been a buyer from me. I never thought that he wanted to work, but he said, well, he would like to work. He was living off a

fixed income, and I didn't think he ever had to work. Well, I don't think he had to; but he wanted to, at any rate, so I hired him. Well, I went to Jake and I said, "Jake, I want my books back." Well, Jake says, "You can't do this. You'll take half my stock out of my store." I said, "Jake, remember the agreement."

GARDNER: How old was he at this point?

EPSTEIN: Jake is a year younger than I.

GARDNER: So you were the two enfants terribles.

EPSTEIN: It was '28, and I was twenty-six. He was about twenty-five. So he complained bitterly about it. I said, "Come on, Jake, I'm opening my own store." So there we were; we just opened Louis Epstein's Book Shop. I gave up the idea of Acadia. [laughter] And there it was, waiting for all to see. It was not a fancy shop. I never had a fancy shop. This was quite primitive. I was fortunate; I was able to get hold of a lot of good books, not rarities in the sense that they were worth hundreds of dollars, but good material that libraries would buy, students would need--a good literary student who was really interested. Like Larry Powell, for instance, started coming in there. He used to come to Sixth Street, and then when I moved to Eighth he used to come with a Professor [Carlyle F.] MacIntyre. He was a wild guy. He used to bring his students with him, and amongst them was the chap who's now a book salesman for

several publishers, Bill Webb. He said, "I remember coming in there with MacIntyre." And other people who are now politicians--a lot of young lawyers. At that time the Garfield Building had been opened, Eighth and Hill Street, and all the very young lawyers were there, especially the Jewish lawyers. They used to park their cars on Grand Avenue and walk from Hill Street to Grand and pass right by my door. A lot of people who went to the May Company or the offices downtown--they didn't have garages underneath like they have today, so they would have to park on Grand or Hope or Olive. Well, those who parked on Grand and beyond had to walk by my door, and I made some beautiful friendships and customers of people who just dropped in. And the business just grew. It was doing rather nicely from the start. Our expenses were almost nil. Rent was relatively cheap, and we weren't paying too much wages. Up until the time I was married, I could reinvest almost all that I earned back into the business. And as I say, I made contacts with these people--auctioneers and warehouse people, storage-house people. And I got some beautiful libraries out of storage houses. You know, people would put their stuff away, come out here from the East and send their stuff out here, hoping to have a big home someday and never getting around to buying a big home. Or something would happen: a person in the family would die and the stuff would be put

in storage, be there for ten, fifteen years sometimes. And the library was sold off by the heirs. They didn't want the books. And a lot of those books were excellent books. I was very fortunate in getting some of those libraries. I used to go up to Santa Barbara, browse through the furniture stores there. I picked up a lot of books in Santa Barbara. Santa Barbara was a good place for me to pick up books in those days.

GARDNER: Were other dealers treading the same trails?

EPSTEIN: Other dealers would do some of it, but apparently they didn't do it as regularly or assiduously or as energetically as I did. But for some reason or other, I was able to make the contact and keep it. That was the big thing. There was a man by the name of Orth who ran a storage house in Pasadena, Orth Storage. (Now it's called Yellow Van and Storage or something like that. You see it on Colorado Boulevard when you come off the bridge. Now all the storage houses are consolidated like national chains.) Anyway, I went in to him one day, and I asked to see Mr. Orth. I said, "I've been coming here now for a year asking if you have any books to sell me, and everybody tells me you don't have. Now, I buy books at the Lyon's Storage, I buy books at Bekins Storage, at every storage house in the area, and I don't believe that there are never any books here." He says, "Nobody ever told you there were never any books here."

"Well," I said, "nobody has ever offered to show them to me." He said, "That's right, too." So I said, "Well, I'd like to make the contact. I can give you references from storage houses, other kinds, auctioneers, furniture dealers, that I buy books from them, they're happy with me"--I really made a case for myself. I said, "Look, all I want is an opportunity to bid on them." "Oh," he said, "we've got one fellow here"--and he gave me the name--"who's been buying our books for years." I said, "Well, that's good enough. I know who he is. I know him well. Give me an opportunity to bid." And you know, apparently I so impressed him with my earnestness, he said, "All right. Next time I have a library, I'll let you bid." He told me he expected one to come up. In six weeks I got a call from him, this Mr. Orth himself. He said, "Mr. Epstein?" I said, "Look, my name is Louis"--I was so much younger than he--"so if you want to call me Louis it would be all right." So he said, "All right, Louis. I have a batch of books; I want you to come and make me a bid. I'm going to take your bid and the other man's bid." I said, "Fine. It couldn't be any more fair." So I went out and I left the bid. It was a very nice library, very nice--good general material, and a minimum of sets, but good basic items that would fit into libraries, personal libraries, especially public libraries and college libraries. He said, "I'll

let you know in a couple days." In a couple days he called me, and he said, "Louis, you won the bid." "Oh," I said, "I'm very happy to hear that." It was a hell of a big lot of books. He said, "Do you want to come and pick them up?" I said, "No. You've got all kinds of trucks there. I want you to deliver them and bill me." Gee, that was great. I said, "I'll be out there. I'll pay you off, and you just put them on one of your trucks and deliver them. There's no special hurry; if you're busy, I'll wait a couple days." You know, I'd make it as easy as I could for him. He said, "No, we've got plenty of available trucks." Then he said to me, "You want to know how you stood?" "No," I said, "I would never ask it, because I wouldn't want to embarrass you. It might be embarrassing. But I sure am interested how I came out; I know I won." He said, "You were better than twice what the other guy offered." "Well," I said, "I can understand that. He's a different kind of a dealer than I am, to begin with." He had a store near First and Main. And he was not a person who was very well liked in the trade. He was a very backward sort of a bookseller. He didn't belong in the book business. And I said, "I can understand that. He was paying according to the values he thought they were, and I was paying according to the values I have for them. This is one of the things that I tried to tell you and one of the reasons why I keep going back to all these

other places that I mentioned." "Now you can get all our books." And that was a source of supply for years.

I developed that with a number of dealers. I would go to used-furniture people, and occasionally in buying a home of furniture they would buy a lot of books. And I told them--left my card--"Give me a ring, and I'll come right out." And several of them did that. Some of them never got hold of decent books. If the books were good, I paid them a relatively decent price for them, because I wanted to build up a regular source of supply. And I had another deal with them. I said, "If it's something you don't know how to buy, you call me. I'll buy it, and I will always give you a commission. You'll always get a commission." And I'd go in with the new-book dealers who didn't handle old books, even Mr. Parker. I once told him, "If you ever see a library, Mr. Parker, if one of your customers wants to get rid of something, call me, here's my card." He knew where to get me if he needed me. But the fact that I gave him a card and told him to call me--he referred a number of people to me. And his customers always had good books.

One of the most interesting things that happened: there was a chap in Santa Barbara who ran the Tecolote Bookshop. There's still a Tecolote Bookshop, but it's not owned by the same people. His name was [Roger] Boutell. He had been in

the State Department service, Foreign Service. And he set up in Santa Barbara, had a little money, settled in Santa Barbara, was acquainted with all the fine people there, and he opened this Tecolote Bookshop. They would handle only very nice books. And what he recommended, his customers bought, because he was acquainted with them socially, knew their tastes, knew their capacities--those who wanted mystery stories, those who wanted Westerns. And I first became acquainted with him when I went in there--in the De La Guerra Court, the place was there. There was a rack of books outside of his store, and they were mysteries and Westerns marked fifteen cents each. They were from the circulating library. Some had circulated once or twice, and some three, four times. But to me they were well worth fifteen cents, so I told him, "Sell them all to me." He said, "Look, you want them all, take them for ten cents a piece." It was great. So I became acquainted with him, and I said, "Look, do any of your people ever sell a library?" He said, "They do sometimes." I said, "Would you do me the favor and give me a ring or drop me a card or call me collect, and I'll bid on them." Well, okay, so once or twice he gave me some names, and I went out there--minor pieces of library. And I offered him five dollars, but he wouldn't take it. He said, "I'll do it for you." So one Saturday morning I get a phone call from him. He said, "The sons of Mr. . . ."

Who was the guy that started Castoria? You wouldn't know, but anyways, I'll think of the name. Lord? So he says, this man he referred to, very extremely wealthy man. In the last ten years of his life he was blind. He had a library. So he employed a librarian or a reader, and they would go through the London Times book supplement and would mark off the books that he would like to have read to him. And they would mark off far more than they ever possibly could read to him. And he would send away and get them. So this library was that kind of a library.

This Boutell called me, and he said, "You call so-and-so; the sons are here." The sons were living in London. And they want to sell what they don't want. I said, "Fine." He said, "Here's the number; call them up; they're there right now." So I immediately got on the phone, called them up. I said, "Mr. Boutell just called me." He said, "Yes?" I said, "I would like to come out and see your books." "When?" "How about Monday morning?" "Fine." "How many books do you have?" "Well," he says, "about 200." So I took my wife and my sister for a ride. Two hundred books you could throw in the back of the car, no problem. So we went there and drove up to a beautiful estate. We ring the door, walk in. The servant shows us, "Mr. So-and-so's in there; he's expecting you. This is where the books are." We walk in there, and there's shelves this high all around the room. Above the

shelves were prints, paintings, pictures of all kinds. A lot of the paintings were already missing and all that. So I said, "Which are the books you want to sell?" Because I can see there's 1,000 books here, and he said 200." "Oh, all of them." I didn't say anything, but there it was. If I buy them, how am I going to get them all in the car, plus three people? So I looked around. I have a habit that if I'm buying from someone, I never say, "I will give you so much money." "How much do you want for them?" "Well," he said, "oh, I don't know. Are they worth $250?" So instead of giving myself away and saying, "Great, I'll take them," being too eager, I said, "Well, it's a long drive from Los Angeles." [laughter] So he said, "Well, what would you like to pay?" I said, "Two hundred dollars." He said, "Okay." If I'd said $100, he would have said okay. And probably if I'd given him a story that I was very poor and didn't have any money, he'd probably have said, "Take them." But at any rate, that was one of the nicest libraries I ever bought. There were no great rarities in them. But every one was a solid book in perfect condition. In those days the British books, as far as bookmaking, were so far superior to the American that each book just stood out on the shelf. Well, we had a time getting them home; that's another story. But we finally got them into the store, and I put them to one side. I didn't mark them.

Shortly before that time, a year or two, the Beverly Hills Public Library broke away from the county library system and started their own library. I went to solicit the librarian for business. And Mary Boynton first fought me off, and I had to convince her that she ought to give me a trial. "Let me bring out 100 books. I'll choose them. A hundred books. And I'll bring them up into your office, put them on the table. Then keep them as long as you like. And make up your mind. If my books are not worthwhile, you tell me and I'll never come here again. But if they are something you can use, I assure you my price will be fair." Well, I put it on a basis that she would have to be a pretty horrible person not to. You know who she was buying books from? Wright Howes in Chicago. Well, Wright Howes is an excellent bookseller. But he's not cheap. (I think he's gone now.) I knew him. He used to come into my store to pick up things. And I sold him books by mail. I said, "I know Wright Howes; he's a very fine bookseller. But we are here. And I get a lot of fine books. And I want an opportunity. Just give me one try, and it won't cost you one penny. I'll bring them here, I'll take them away, and I'll take up a minimum of your time. I'm not going to give you a sales pitch. My books are going to do the talking for me. They're a miscellaneous lot of 100 books that I think belong in the library. Now, you may have some of them already,

but I'm sure you won't have all of them." She said, "No, our selection is still pretty thin."

Okay, we agreed on that. I took the books there, and she bought more than half of them. And that convinced her that I was in earnest. And I said, "If you will allow me to do this with every library that I buy--and I buy a lot of good books--to pick out those things that I think you can use and bring them to you, take back those you don't want. You can buy all of them or none of them." So we made this arrangement. She became very happy with it; and I was, too, of course, and we got along beautifully. She was an exceptionally good librarian, and she was a good businesswoman. I told her, "I will not always be the cheapest and I will not always be the highest. I will try my best always to be fair. And if you ever find something that I overcharge you for, you tell me about it and I'll rebate you." Sometimes you have a book, and you don't know what it's worth. You put a price on it, and you're not positive of it yourself. We worked on that basis.

Well, when I got this library from Santa Barbara, I said in my own mind that was something that she had to see before anyone else. So I called her and told her about it, and I said, "I want you to be the first one to see it." She said, "But I have no means of getting by; I have no time." I said, "This is one time I'm going to ask you to give me some of your

own personal time." I said, "I will pick you up Sunday morning; I will bring you down to the shop. I will have an assistant there; the books will be all lined up so you can see them as quickly as possible. And all you've got to do is pick out what you want, and you will buy them at 50 percent of their published price. And they're all in perfect mint condition." And I explained to her that they were all British books and so forth. Well, she balked a little about giving up her time, but finally I convinced her and she came down. You know, she picked out $800 worth of books--at our price. That's probably $1,600 retail. And they were brand-new, fine books, some of which weren't even published in this country. She had good taste for books, and she knew that she was buying for a superior community. But in those days that was one hell of a lot of dough. She was very happy with them, and from there on, for years, we just sold her books--as long as I was in the used-book business. And you will see a great many books in the Beverly Hills Library today--they used to mark in the books when they'd get them in, the source, the provenance of where they came from--and you'll find after the title page and the copyright page, at the bottom there you will see a line where they came from. You'll see a lot of them with the name "Epstein" on them.

GARDNER: I'm going to have to go look.

EPSTEIN: They have a set of Racinet's costume book [History of Costume], a beautiful set that I sold them. I have to go in there and take a look at some of my old treasures.

GARDNER: Or you could buy them back now. Were there any other libraries that you had that sort of arrangement with?

EPSTEIN: Yes. Only one. And that was Burbank. That is a corollary story to the Beverly Hills story. We were in our shop in Eighth Street on a dull day in summer, and two women came in. And I remember the names--Mrs. [Virginia Cole] Pritchard is one, and the other one, Mrs. [Elizabeth] Ripley. They said, "We are from the Burbank Public Library. We just are breaking away. We're starting a new library. We're breaking away from the county, and the city's going to have its own library system." That was Mrs. Pritchard talking. And she said they came here because Mary Boynton of the Beverly Hills Library said that they've got to come to me, that I will sell them a lot of good books and save them a lot of money. And you know, nobody could have said anything nicer to me right at that moment. Because coming from Mary Boynton--I consider her one of the smartest librarians that I ever had contact with. Very businesslike--she was one of these nervously energetic characters, but not fluttery as to thinking. She was always on the move. And she'd sit down and come directly to the point, very businesslike. It was such a compliment to me that I said, "Well, if I sell you

a book or not, you've done me a great favor. You've brought me the nicest compliment I can think of pertaining to books, because I consider Mary Boynton probably the smartest librarian I ever met. And I'm not knocking any other librarian. She knows her business; she's a good librarian. She knows her books, and she's very business-like." "Well," she says, "we consider her that. We were recommended to her for that reason"--so apparently she was recognized.

"Well, how do you go about it?" "Well, what do you need?" "Well, we don't know what we need, but we have" (what they call in the library business) "a first-purchase list"--the books you should purchase first: certain reference books, certain standard things. I said, "Fine. I've worked with that list off and on now. It contains I don't know how many--a couple thousand books." She said, "Well, we have the list." I took a quick glance at the list. I said, "Well, some of the things I can see I have, but I will want the opportunity to work on it, and I will go scout around and see how many I can find. How long can I keep this list?" "Well," she said, "how long do you need it?" "Well," I said, "give me three weeks." So we had this list. And then also I said, "And I may submit additions to it, what I think you will want a little later." "Well," she said, "we'll consider them."

So I had the list, and the first thing I did was scout all the other bookstores in the area. There's a lot of staple library things that libraries will buy, but in the bookstore they may sit on the shelf until a library wants them, which may be who knows when. So I went all through all the other bookstores, and scouted around, and bought several hundred books from other dealers. There's a little story connected with that, pertaining to Holmes, which will come up a little later, maybe. After three weeks I got all these books together, and I listed them--priced and listed them. So I called them up. I said, "Well, Mrs. Pritchard, I have quite a few books for you." She said, "How many do you have?" "Oh," I said, "I've got 12-1500." "Oh," she said, "that's great." I said, "When do you want them?" She said, "Anytime you can bring them." I said, "Well, I've got them all listed and all priced and all billed out. And any you don't want, for whatever reason, after you've seen them, you call me back and I'll take them back." There was a set of [Encyclopedia] Britannica, some sets of standard authors, various foreign language dictionaries. I got a truck and delivered them to her on the day appointed and left them there. And they examined them. You know, they returned about half a dozen books. That's all they returned. I forget whatever reason [they returned them]. And within a month I got a check for $3,500 and some-odd dollars. Can

you imagine getting that much money in those days?

GARDNER: All at once.

EPSTEIN: All at once. Oh, my, that was a great day for rejoicing. Just because of this Mary Boynton. And the follow-up to that: we kept selling them books till after we moved to Hollywood. They gave me an order, and I kept a list of all the things--almost a wide-open order that any books that I think they ought to have, proper price, send them out and they will consider them. And do you know, they kept 80 percent of what I sent out to them. I made it a point not to overload them with a lot of junk that they might not need. I would rather be on the safe side and give them sure things that I was almost positive they would need. Some of the things they sent back, they had maybe gotten somewhere else. Of course, they were still buying books from book distributors and book wholesalers. But it was a great thing.

That's how we prospered a little better maybe than the other guys in the trade. I never priced my books too high. Everybody in those days used to complain and bargain; it was the Depression. Some days we would sit there all day and not take in a dime, and a guy comes in and offers you a dollar, you grab it, just for the sake of something. But we had enough deals like that: other libraries, some of the private schools discovered that we had good books. They used to

come by. And we developed a pretty good trade of book collectors. We didn't have the rarities. We'd get rarities once in a while, but usually the rarities we sold to a specialist, like Dawson or somebody else. We knew that Mrs. Doheny was buying a lot of books, but I couldn't get to Mrs. Doheny. I would have to go through somebody else.

GARDNER: How would you know?

EPSTEIN: I knew the type of thing she was collecting, and I knew she was buying. That was the stuff that she would buy. There weren't too many prospects for that particular type of thing. And some of the people would tell me. It was no secret.

GARDNER: What about personnel? When did you first start having somebody to help you around the shop?

EPSTEIN: Well, my first helper on Sixth Street was my younger sister. She was going to high school, and she used to come down once or twice a week after school. Otherwise, I had no helper. I would go see my books after hours or early in the morning before I opened up. She used to come down. One day I had to go to an auction, the first auction I ever went to. I saw a C.H. O'Connor advertisement in the paper selling furniture and other things, and they had a line of books. So when Cema came down, I rushed out there--it wasn't too far from downtown--and the man (C.H. O'Connor) said he'd sell his books at three o'clock. Well, he was a man of his word, I supposed. So I waited till three o'clock, and there he was selling furniture and rugs and one thing and another. So I tapped him on the

elbow. I said, "Look, you said three o'clock." He didn't look at me, even; he kept right on operating. So about fifteen or twenty minutes later, I tapped him again. He said, "Young man, I'll sell the books when I get around to them." He cut me off. Well, I had so much time invested in it already, but I was worried about my sister being all by herself that long. Anyway, I was there till four-thirty or five, till everything's sold. And he puts up a bookcase full of books. "How much am I offered for these books?" "Five dollars." "Sold." I said five dollars, and he sold them to me. So he takes me aside. He says, "You're a new young man, aren't you?" "Well," I said, "I just started in the book business." He said, "Well, let me tell you something, young man." (He was much older than I.) He said, "When I am selling furniture, rugs, and I've got my crowd in my hand bidding, I'm not going to stop for a handful of books because they don't mean anything to me. That's why I'm knocking them down to five dollars." And he said, "If you attend my sale and you're a dealer, and I have things that you deal in, sometime during the sale you're going to get a bargain." In other words, he's going to knock something down cheap so you will not have wasted the time. In that way, he says, "I want you to come to my sales, but if I'm working and I've got the crowd bidding well on these expensive things, I can't afford to stop." He established that rapport to me; he was very frank with me. And I said, "Well, I've got my younger sister down there all by herself." He said,

"I realize that; I'm sorry I made you wait so long; but remember that you plan your time if you come to my sale. If I advertise books and you come to one of my sales and I know you're a dealer, sometime during that sale I'm going to knock something down to you very cheap so that you'll at least make a little bit for your time." And he did that; he lived up to his word. He never sold any books without calling me. Anytime he had a sale--where he didn't even advertise books. And sometimes if he had too much to sell, he figured out his time, how many items, he would call me in and sell me the books without a sale, before the sale, because he knew his time would be so precious--handling very expensive material, and these are medium-price books. He can't be bothered. He'd rather sell them to me before the sale. He always saw to it that I got a deal. Sometimes I'd go to a sale, and Ann would be left at home, and I'd wait till three o'clock in the morning. One time there was a whole roomful of books, and Ann waited till three o'clock in the morning. He knocked them down to me for ninety-five dollars. There was a little bit of competition; it got to ninety-five--"Sold to Epstein."

GARDNER: What did your competition say when something like that happened?

EPSTEIN: Well, they bid, and then he sold them at the next bid. He saw to it that even if I didn't bid ninety-five dollars, he would say, "Sold to Epstein." And later on,

you know, he would use that. A lot of auctioneers do that. It's a trick of the trade. There would be bidding, and the bidding would lag, so he would call out a few bids--out of nowhere. And he wouldn't get a further bid; so he'd say, "Sold to Epstein." And after the sale, I'd go over to get my bill: "What do you want me to put down for these?" He'd ask me what I wanted to pay for them. Most of the time if he'd knock, and I'd say, "Well, I can use these for X number of dollars"--"Okay, bill them at that. Tell the bookkeeper to bill them at that." Oh, I could tell you a lot of stories. [laughter]

GARDNER: Well, back to help, then.

EPSTEIN: Yes. I had my sister come down, and this went on for a little while. I never did have full-time help in that Sixth Street store.

GARDNER: Oh, you never did. I would have thought that with the volume you were building up, you would have needed it.

EPSTEIN: Well, it wasn't a large volume. I never had full-time help. I did have that Biola boy for a little while, and every once in a while I'd leave a customer there and I'd ask him, "Are you going to be here for long?" He'd say, "Why? You want to go somewhere? Go ahead. You want to go to lunch?" "I want to go away for an hour." "Okay, go ahead; I'll be around." There were a lot of people whom I could trust. I never found anybody that would rob me. They knew I was struggling along.

One afternoon when my sister was there and I went out, a man came in to buy something, and he bought something, and he gave her a fifty-dollar bill. Fifty-dollar bills today are common, but up to that time she had never seen one. She didn't know what to do with it. She didn't have change for it in her register--we wouldn't have fifty dollars' worth of change. So the man who gave it to her said, "Go ahead, open your register. You'll find my name in it." Well, that really threw her. She didn't know what the hell the guy was trying to do. So she said, "Well, I haven't got change." He said, "Go ahead, open the register. I'll show you my name is in it." And his name was in it. His name was C.U. Whiffin, and he had the agency, the western territory, California territory, Los Angeles, for National Cash Registers. One of their salesmen sold us a cheap cash register for about twenty-five, thirty dollars, and I guess he must have told Mr. Whiffin to go about the store, and if he's around, go in there and buy something. So I came back, and that girl was really frantic. Well, finally he went out and changed the fifty-dollar bill. But when he told her to open the register because his name was in it, she didn't know what to make of that. [laughter]

But as far as help, we didn't have any help. It was only after I started on Eighth Street I started with part-time help. But the Sixth Street store was a little tiny

store, 400 square feet, less area than this living room.

GARDNER: Even on Eighth Street you never built up to full time?

EPSTEIN: Well, we eventually built up to full time there, yes.

GARDNER: How late would that have been?

EPSTEIN: Well, it was after I'd been open about a year. You see, there we were open evenings, too. I would work three evenings a week, and the helper would work three evenings. Later on we even got another part-timer.

GARDNER: So it was part time.

EPSTEIN: Yeah, I never had more than one and a half help--in the sense, one part time, one full time. Oh, occasionally when we had a raft of books coming in, I might employ somebody for half a day.

GARDNER: Who were some of the people who you had working for you? Anyone who went on in the business at all?

EPSTEIN: Well, both [Robert] Bennett and [Richard] Marshall they each worked for me.

GARDNER: On Eighth Street?

EPSTEIN: No, Marshall worked on Eighth Street and Bennet worked in Hollywood. H. Richard Archer, who is now a college librarian, I think, in some library in Kentucky--he worked for me for a while part time. They were all going to school at the time. They were too bright to work for me for any

length of time. They were very eager to learn more than I could teach them. And in some things they knew more than I knew. They knew the literature far better than I did. Their ambitions were too high to remain a clerk in a second-hand bookstore. The pay was next to nothing. So eventually Bennett and Marshall worked for Dawson for a while, and then they opened their own store. Oh, there are others around here who at one time or another worked for me.

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GARDNER: The first item of evidence is the card from the Acadia Bookshop that you have here. Do you want to tell something about that--about the address, the circumstances getting the card and so forth?

EPSTEIN: Well, I found this little store after a number of weeks of looking. It was owned by people by the name of McCarty Brothers. They owned about half a block on West Sixth Street--one-story, oh, pretty run-down property. The McCartys owned a hell of a lot of property around the city. But they were nice people and we got along nicely. They leased me the location; I think I paid $125 a month. I told them what I wanted to do. Of course, I was still quite young, and they were probably a little suspicious whether I'd make it or not, with all the competition right there on Sixth Street--which was Book Row at that time. We managed. But curiously enough, in 1933 we opened the Argonaut at 623 West Sixth Street; and at the time the Argonaut opened at 623, by that time my old location--625--had become a little grocery shop selling small items of groceries for the people who lived in rooming houses all around. And forever after, whoever was writing up my history in the book business always got confused which was the first and which was the second. They will find in some of the publications

that have written something about my career that that's a little bit garbled. There was the Acadia and the Argonaut; they got those mixed up. But it did no one any harm.

GARDNER: Well, there was also Louis Epstein's, and you showed me this catalog that's from July 1931. Is this the only catalog you ever produced?

EPSTEIN: That was the only catalog we ever produced. It had a few very good items in it. And it was done by Thomas Perry Stricker, who was a typographer. (And UCLA has a collection of his work. I have quite a few of his things, and I gave UCLA quite a few items that they didn't have.) I'll speak more about Thomas Perry Stricker than the catalog because he was quite an interesting person, a very hard-working young man who was at the right place at the wrong time. There wasn't too much demand for fine typographical work in those years. If you notice the date, that was a pretty rough year. He designed it and he helped me plan it. Incidentally, he later helped us to make the layout for the stationery for the Pickwick Bookshop when we decided to move. He worked with me on designing the Mr. Pickwick. As you know, we got the name Pickwick after much search for a name. We probably went over hundreds of names in our minds. We always came back to Pickwick. It sounded well, and he approved of that decision. I respected his judgment in literature; he was quite a literary fellow. But he was a starving

typographer. We probably fed him as often as we saw him. He died at a young age. All the people in the trade knew him. Jake knew him, and the Dawsons, of course, knew him. He was a bookish person besides being a typographer. He designed a little booklet for the Hollywood Bowl, I recollect. I may have a copy of that somewhere in the house. So that gets you to the very, very beginnings of the idea of Pickwick. It was the catalog you wanted me to talk about.

GARDNER: Well, just a little bit. How did you know him originally? Had he come into your shop a lot?

EPSTEIN: You know, the book business is almost a business, you might say, similar to a bar. I mean, one is drunk on books and the other is drunk on whiskey; and in each place they hang around, if you know what I mean. They browse, [laughter] one from the stool at the bar and the other through his books. One, of course, concentrates on one thing, and the other goes around from shelf to shelf. If a person is the least bit friendly--and which apparently I must have been; maybe I still am--you sort of draw people. They're sort of drawn to you and you to them, and friendships form. And some of them are very lasting and very fine friendships. I'm proud of a great many of them, and I'm very happy with a great many of the friendships that I've made, right through that kind of thing. A book buyer keeps coming back all the time, because he's hoping to find the book tomorrow

that he didn't find today; or that first edition that got away last week, maybe I'll get another one this week; or they'll find something else. You could write a whole book about that. At any rate, that's how I met Thomas Perry Stricker.

GARDNER: What made you decide to put out a catalog?

EPSTEIN: Ego primarily, I suppose. Dawson was putting out catalogs; Jake had a few catalogs. I was always reading somebody else's catalog. We had a few nice books that weren't selling too rapidly, so we thought we'd try it. It was not a financial success. Very few catalogs at that time were, frankly.

GARDNER: I saw that the first item was a Tom Sawyer that I think would have paid the entire expense of the catalog.

EPSTEIN: Well, it would have if we had sold it at the time. We later sold it, but not from the catalog. And we did not get $450 for it. It was rough go. People just didn't shell out that kind of money like they do today. And another thing that I lacked: you see, I had never really had big items in the sense of the $1,000 items, the $100 items. I had relatively few of those. And I had not built up a trade for that yet. As a matter of fact, my particular kind of old-book business did not really go after that. These were findings of books and libraries that we bought, but our primary interest was in good books on all subjects, not

necessarily the real rare things that collectors collect. We were buying things that I could sell to the Los Angeles Public Library, to the Beverly Hills Public Library, more of what you might call staple stock books, and good things that the general reader might want who didn't want first editions necessarily. We had a lot of first-edition people come and look, and we sold a lot of first editions, but that was not our primary interest. Rare books was not the primary interest. It was the general, good secondhand book stock. With that we were very successful. We were able to dig out the books. I can't even to this day tell you how. It's probably a matter of luck and maybe energy. You just keep moving around looking for things. My wife could probably tell you more about how much time I spent doing that than I would care to tell you.

GARDNER: You know, this brings to mind the question: since most dealers around would have been more in the rare and first editions, and then there would have been a mass of people doing the same thing that you did, what made yours more successful than some of the others that were doing the same thing?

EPSTEIN: Well, maybe I put more effort into it. Maybe I was much more single-minded about it. When I decide on a thing, I become a one-track mind. And maybe that's necessary. And we were hungry. In July 1931, when we already

had this catalog, Aaron was less than two years old. We were just getting started. Our first place after we moved out of a furnished place was in Boyle Heights, because my family lived there. We lived on Cincinnati Street. We moved there because it was closer to our family, and we thought that perhaps the family might be more helpful to Ann and the baby. We moved into a flat which had a little table and four chairs in the dining-room area of the kitchen. We bought a bed and a stove and a mattress and the dresser and, I think, one small chair at an auction of C.H. O'Connor's for forty-eight dollars. [tape stopped] In the living room we had nothing. In the bedrooms we had just what we described. We had three rooms. We had two bedrooms. We had to have some help, because Mrs. E just didn't have the energy. We had to have a maid. Of course, you could get people in those days for twenty-five, thirty dollars a month. You had to feed them and provide living quarters for them. So that gets back to maybe why I had to be perhaps more active than the next person. But basically, if I start on something, I'm either totally interested or not interested at all. The spirit of the chase was always with me. I would run down any clue to where I might find a library. And as I mentioned, I think in our other interview, in the incident with the storage house, I persisted and finally broke through and got him to sell me things. That all took time, took

effort, and maybe a certain type of persistence.

GARDNER: Were there any merchandising or selling devices that you used that were any different from what other people were doing in those days?

EPSTEIN: No. I was probably not as progressive in selling as some of them were. We didn't make up lists for libraries; we didn't use any special methods of display; our shop was far, far from elegant. As a matter of fact, I dislike elegant bookshops. Maybe after you get to be an institution where you sell real rare books, you have to keep them in cases and whatnot. But we encouraged browsing, unlimited browsing; and unless they severely misbehaved, anyone could come in the morning and stay all day if they wanted to, and some people did, especially on cold days. I'm talking about those very difficult times in the thirties.

GARDNER: All your income was derived from the shop at that time, wasn't it?

EPTSEIN: Oh, you can say that a thousand times over. There was no inherent income. Mrs. E had eight dollars in her purse when we were married, and I had a lot of secondhand books. We were very fortunate: my father gave us a car as a wedding present. That helped out a great deal.

GARDNER: What kind of car?

EPSTEIN: It was a Ford, brand-new. I think he paid about $850 for it. A nice car--we had it for years.

GARDNER: What eventually happened to Stricker, by the way?

EPSTEIN: He died in New York of pneumonia in the early forties. Carl Haverlin, a friend of his, told me.

GARDNER: I just wondered if you had kept up with him.

EPSTEIN: I saw very little of him after we moved to Hollywood because he left for the East.

GARDNER: Now, the other item is one that you wanted to read in before we start on any other substantive discussion.

EPSTEIN: Yes. Well, correct the information about leaving Kasheritz to the following: We left by wagon from Kasheritz to Glussk to Bobruysk. From there, from Bobruysk, we went by train, as I told you. Instead of what I thought--Riga--it was Libava. I think the name has been changed now to something else [Liepāja]. From there we went by boat, that stinking boat I told you about, [laughter] to Hull, England, and by train to Liverpool, across England. And then to New York, Castle Garden--or Ellis Island, as it was called later. That was it.

GARDNER: Okay. Now I think you've compiled this very thorough list of the bookstores, the different ones that were around. Perhaps you'd like to go through it.

EPSTEIN: Well, it's not that thorough, but for the record they should be mentioned, and someday I'll actually type it up and maybe make a pamphlet out of it just for the sake of recording things. I'll describe to you the method that I

used, and if anyone in the future wants to know how it was done and where corrections could be made, I think a much more complete list could be compiled maybe by using the Los Angeles city directories that they used to have. I don't mean the telephone directories. They used to have a business directory and also a city directory.

GARDNER: I haven't seen those in years.

EPSTEIN: No, I haven't either. I don't think they make them anymore. But in those days they had a directory that listed every resident, their occupation and their address. It was a commercial thing. But I guess the value of it must have lessened, and people maybe didn't buy them.

I think for the record we should mention the bookstores that I knew either personally or knew about or had heard about, because they were an imposing lot.

You know, in those days Los Angeles--I think W.M. Garland on his building downtown was still shooting for 750,000 people. When I came in '23 he had a sign on his building, "500,000 by 1925" as the goal for the population. Well, they exceeded that. Then he raised it for the next five years to 750,000. They made it, and then he raised it to 1,000,000. So at any rate, in 1925 they were shooting for 500,000 people. They had 500-, maybe 600,000 at the time. The busiest traffic corner, to my knowledge, was Adams and Figueroa. That's before they had signals. And boy, how that traffic used

to mess around!

GARDNER: That's where the Auto Club is, isn't it?

EPSTEIN: That's where the Auto Club is today, and the church.

GARDNER: What sort of things were there then?

EPSTEIN: Well, at that corner, you know, Adams Avenue was the Fifth Avenue of homes. There were some beautiful homes. The Dohenys lived right near the church, and all the early families, the rich early families. And along Figueroa Street there were some beautiful homes and wealthy people lived along there. I remember there was still a zanja there along Figueroa Street. Do you know what a zanja is? How long have you lived in California?

GARDNER: Seventeen years, eighteen years.

EPSTEIN: Well, a zanja is where the irrigating water used to go along the street. It was part of the irrigation system. At that time, as I recollect, there was a trough-like canal about a foot wide and maybe three feet deep.

GARDNER: It ran along the side of the street?

EPSTEIN: Yes. It was very interesting. Well, to get back to the booksellers: Fowler's was at 747 Broadway. Dawson's was at 627 South Grand. They hadn't been there too long. I don't know how many years before they'd moved from Hill Street. Campbell's Bookstore was at 858 North Vermont. After they moved the UCLA campus, he followed UCLA. He

started in the book business a year before I did, he says. And I'm sure he did. Bob wouldn't tell me anything that isn't so. But he was in the textbook business. We kept arguing and arguing. The textbook business doesn't count, [laughter] for the honor of who's the oldest guy around. The California Book Company was 218 West First Street. That was run by Max Walker. Max was a very curious guy. He came into my shop (after I opened on Eighth Street) out of curiosity and just to say hello. He saw that I had a cash register. I'd picked one up for about fifteen, twenty dollars, a real old-fashioned one with a handle on it. "Oh," he says, "Louis, I wouldn't have a cash register. You're just inviting somebody to hold you up." [laughter]

GARDNER: What happened with him?

EPSTEIN: Well, he stayed in business, I don't know how many years after that. It was a secondhand-book business. He got sick, and he sold out his business. And shortly after he sold out, he died. But he ran a very poorly lighted shop. He put the emphasis on saving the dollar rather than spending it to improve his business. You could hardly see what he had. He had no bookish background whatever. But I assume that he made enough money to support his family and own a home. But he was not considered a real bookman.

GARDNER: What did his shop become when it was sold? What became of it? California Book Company was not around?

EPSTEIN: Oh, I think the store ran for a year or two after that under that name. I don't recollect who bought it. It was dispersed. The name was dispersed, and so were the books. No one took up the name. I think someone else is using it, but not for used books. It's a good name; I don't know why somebody doesn't advertise it. The new-book stores, of course, I said Fowler, and Jones was still operating at 426 West Eighth Street. [tape stopped] Parker and Fowler were the new-book stores in downtown. Fowler had a more general trade, and Parker had what you might call the carriage trade of the city. And you bought what he told you to buy. And if you didn't, he didn't want your business. But he had excellent taste in books, and he built up some fine libraries. Later his place went bankrupt during the Depression. I think he might have saved himself had he been willing to compromise some of his ideas of bookselling. But he would not sell dollar books. (In a way it's similar to the mass-market business of paperbacks. They were reprints of popular books, mostly nonfiction, and they sold for a dollar.) They were excellent values, and they were great things for the booksellers of that day. But he wouldn't break his rule, or whatever you might call it. He wouldn't condescend to sell a reprint of a book for a dollar. Whereas everyone else had to do it and did do it, he had to do it and didn't do it. Fowler's suffered through the Depression and

made it. Jones' Bookstores, as I mentioned, was still operating. They were on Sixth Street, I think at 418 or 426. I have two numbers for them. It may be they had both numbers. No, they couldn't have had. I think they moved over from one to the other. They later went out of business.

GARDNER: Who ran that shop?

EPSTEIN: Mr. Andrews. When Jones closed up, he later became buyer and operator for the Biola Institute, their bookshop, which was a religious bookshop.

GARDNER: We can check that up and find out.

EPSTEIN: His son later became sales manager for a publishing house. I just can't think of what the son's name is now. It may come back to me before we're through.

Now, in Hollywood at that time there was the Hollywood Bookstore, which was west of Highland near the theater. It was 6812 Hollywood Boulevard, and it was operated by a chap name of [Odo] Staude, a German--a very fine person and a very fine bookman. They later on moved. The Depression finally got them, too. For a good number of years some wealthy woman was subsidizing it, really. But I think she became tired of that.

There was a place called Leonard's on Hollywood Boulevard just a few doors away from the Hollywood Bookstore. The Hollywood Bookstore was 6812 and Leonard's was 6804.

It was not a bad shop, but they couldn't stand the competition of the other Hollywood bookstore.

Unity Pegue--that's a very unusual name--was operating at that time at 6417 Hollywood Boulevard. She dropped out, according to here, around 1931. As a matter of fact, I bought her catalogs, all her reference material. And curiously enough, Paul Jordan-Smith worked with her for a while. Paul Jordan-Smith, whom you probably wouldn't know, at one time was the book reviewer and critic of books for the Times, and his son . . .

GARDNER: Wilbur Smith.

EPSTEIN: . . . Wilbur, of course, later went with the University Library, the UCLA Library, and became head of Special Collections. Wilbur was one of my early customers, and he used to hang around for hours and hours over at the Pickwick and all other bookshops. He used to come in with some of his buddies or alone. We knew each other quite well. His father was a very nice person. But for a while he was with Unity Pegue. It was sort of an exclusive shop, and they handled some rare books, too, in addition to new books. And she knew all the big people in Hollywood. But for one reason or another the Depression got them, I think. They ran an elegant shop. It wasn't exactly forbidding, but a person who didn't have much money knew damned well not to go in there, because there was nothing cheap about that shop.

For those days, they were very high priced for the things they had.

GARDNER: What was she like?

EPSTEIN: It's a long time for me to remember. As I recollect, she was still quite young in 1926. To me she appeared middle-aged, maybe thirty-five or forty-five--I don't know. [laughter] To a young person, a thirty-five-year-old is middle-aged. A very beautiful woman, and active. She knew her graces. But she was pleasant and nice. We did business together. I used to sell her something once in a while when I thought she needed it, or she would call up and ask if I had it. When they went out I bought all her cumulative indexes. In those days they didn't have, like they have today, the Bowker Books in Print, published new each year. If we wanted to know about a book, if the book was in print, number one, we had to go way back and find out when it was published and who published it, and then from that refer to the publisher's catalog. And it wasn't brought up current every day. We might have had to look through four or five years of catalogs, sometimes even more, because if the customer was uncertain, you started with the 1912 one and worked on up until you found it. Nowadays the new bookseller doesn't have to do a damned thing. He just goes to the catalog, and it tells him whether the book's in print or not. Well, it's not an accurate system, and very often

they tell a customer the book is not in print when it actually is, because the Bowker catalog lists only those books of publishers who send him the catalog for inclusion. But there are many small publishers who never bother to send them a catalog, or publishers of a single book. A person will publish one book for himself--or of his own or whatever--and they'll never get into Bowker's catalogs.

But to go back to the booksellers. She was one of the characters of the period. If you met her once, you wouldn't forget her. The public library was still in the Metropolitan Building downtown. They didn't move until sometime in the middle of June '26.

A very famous character in the old-book business at that time was Soldier Joe. He was a veteran of the Spanish-American War. He had a lot of old magazines he used to sell, and odds and ends of things. He still wore a uniform and he wore these leather puttees. At that time he was at 117 North Main Street. This was the farthest north of anyone in the book business. Later on he moved to West Seventh Street. The last I remember of him, he was on West Seventh Street.

GARDNER: Was he an authentically good bookman?

EPSTEIN: No. He knew about the lower end of books, magazines and things like that, and a few technical things [that] when he was down on Main Street, he probably had a use for them. When he got to Seventh Street, I don't know what he

would do with old technical books. But he was a character, always chewing tobacco.

He had a brother, whom I'll come to later, at the Curio Bookshop. His brother had been a hoofer at one time. He never, never forgot it. He always reminded you of it with a little jig he did. The Curio was [owned by] Dave Kohn. Soldier Joe was Joe Kohn. The two brothers weren't very close and they handled different types of business; but as long as I'm on the Curio, Dave Kohn's shop, I'll tell you about it, because of the character of the person rather than his standing in the book business. Because the most interesting part of anything are people, and the people--aside from their quality as entrepreneurs--had other qualities. Dave, as I said, was an ex-hoofer. He went into the book business; he strayed out of the "hoofering" business, as you might call it. [laughter] He was into it before my time, really. He would buy anything. Anything no other dealer in town would want, they took it to Dave Kohn and he bought it. He just couldn't refuse anything. It was a large shop, far bigger than mine, even the one I had on Eighth Street, which wasn't too small of a shop. But he had it so loaded with books that neither he nor anyone else could find anything. And his business suffered because of it. And he was becoming old, and his wife was becoming older, and he had a habit of belching. [laughter] He was

always taking pills. But he was very pleasant, if you didn't mind a few belches here and there and not too clean of a shop. But his heart was in the right place, to characterize him that way. He was willing to help if he was asked for help. He would be willing to share knowledge, and in some things he had knowledge, simply from experience. We often exchanged knowledge about it. He would call me--he'd picked up something--"Louis, this looks like a good item. You know it?" If I knew it, I would tell him and he would do likewise. So one day--this was years after '26--he came to me and he said. . . . [I say] "years after"; [it was] maybe five years, six years. We became friends, and he respected me and my knowledge and what I was doing because he could see I was progressing and he was just standing still, perhaps going backward. He came to me one day and said, "Louis, how come you're prospering"--in the measure of those days--"and here my business is horrible? What shall I do?" I said, "Dave, the first thing you do is call a moratorium on buying. I don't care how cheap"--I didn't say how good--"no matter how cheap you can buy." And then I put another, "Even if it's real good. But the main thing is, don't buy because it's cheap. And even call a moratorium on buying anything. Close your shop for a week. Close your eyes, go through the shelves, pick out two books and throw them away and keep the third. And then what you

have left, classify and arrange." And I said, "You have a lot of good books, but because of all the junk that you have stacked up in the aisles, nobody can go through your aisles. Nobody can see what you've got." I said, "I go in there. I go into a lot of bookstores, and if I see books, I buy them. I can't possibly buy a book from you, and neither can anybody else. I say that not only from my own knowledge, but from anyone who comes in here and talks about the bookstores." "Oh," he says, "Louis, I couldn't do that. I couldn't throw a book away." "Well," I said, "look, it's your choice. You asked me for a suggestion and I gave it to you." And his business died because of that. He sold it to a chap who moved it down somewhere on South Broadway, and he kept it for a while. But he was one of the characters, and any one of the old-timers--I don't know how many left would remember old Dave. Larry Powell, I think, has him mentioned in one of his articles on Sixth Street. The other people in the trade--of course, Dawson, everyone knows about. I don't have to inform anyone about the history of Dawson's.

GARDNER: Well, you could throw in a couple of phrases about where it started.

EPSTEIN: Well, Dawson's, for me, was my college education in the way of books. And it probably was to any other bookseller who wanted to make it that, to all of us, the younger

bookmen--maybe to Jake, maybe to Bennett and Marshall (of course, they are both dead now; I think I mentioned [that] at one time they both had worked for me). That's where all the booksellers used to go to buy, to sell. If we had something that we felt Dawson could use, we took it over there and got ready cash. Whereas it might take us weeks and years to sell something, Dawson had the type of customers [who would buy]. And he issued catalogs. He sold by correspondence, which I didn't do. So he had a market for a lot of things which we didn't have a market for, which were good books. And we could always get a reasonable price from Dawson's--not the highest, perhaps, but on the other hand, it wasn't the lowest. You might differ with him, but it was within hailing distance, you might say. I used to go there religiously. Well, for one reason, I used to have to pass by there to go to the bank, so I would stop in two or three times a week. That was from Eighth Street. But from Sixth Street--the Dawson people were very nice to me when I opened on Sixth Street. I think I mentioned that Mr. Dawson came over, introduced himself, made a few suggestions. Charlie Yale came over; John Friend came over. Practically the entire staff, from time to time, came in and introduced themselves. They were helpful; they would offer meaningful suggestions. When you walked into Dawson's and wanted to buy something, there was that 10 percent discount

they allowed the dealers, and you knew the price exactly, and you picked out what you wanted. If you found an unusual lot--sometimes they bought a big library, needed space, so they would sell you a whole truckful of books: "What'll you give me?" You know, I would have to make an offer. That's how we operated with Dawson's.

GARDNER: When did they start the business?

EPSTEIN: Dawson's? I think Mr. Dawson started his first shop somewhere around 1905 or -6, way back. That's pretty well documented.

GARDNER: Yes, we could check that. I was just wondering, was he really the first?

EPSTEIN: I think I have something; we could check it right now, if you like.

GARDNER: We'll wait until we turn the tape. Was he the first?

EPSTEIN: No, there were other booksellers. In his little autobiography, which I have, he mentions the chap he went to work for before he went in for himself. There were booksellers--maybe not old-book sellers. There were new-book sellers way back in the early [eighteen-]fifties. As a matter of fact, one of the things that the Hellman family, in their store, used to advertise was books. They were far from a bookstore, of course, but they probably had books. One of the pictures shows that one of the things that they

were selling was books. Oh, there were a number of bookstores in the early days of Los Angeles. I'm only confining myself to those that I personally knew or knew about.

GARDNER: I was just filling in an information gap of my own.

EPSTEIN: Well, I think that's documented. Then, of course, Holmes. Now, Holmes was, you might say, the mass distributor of books, the mass buyer and distributor of secondhand books in the city. There's no question about it. Of course, he sold a lot of new books, too--technical things, the more common technical things, basic things, dictionaries and things like that. He had, at the time [about which] I gathered this information--I don't know how accurate it is--one, two, three, four, five, six stores. And at one time I think he had as many as eight. A lot of them were temporary. Some of them were permanent locations in the sense that they were on regular lease. But if a location became unrented somewhere in town, he would lease it on a temporary basis, month to month, probably very cheaply, and put a lot of books in there. He was a very peculiar man. There are notes on Mr. Holmes, but I don't know of anyone that knows enough about him now. I don't know whether his widow's still living; I know that there is a daughter still living. But he was a brother of the Holmes Bookstore up in

San Francisco--Harold. This one was Norman.

GARDNER: Where were some of his other shops?

EPSTEIN: Well, the main one, of course, was 814 West Sixth, near Figueroa. Then a real old shop that he had was at 333 South Main. That he had for years and years. Then he had another one for a long time at 128 South Spring Street.

GARDNER: So they were all in downtown, then?

EPSTEIN: They were all downtown. Oh, yes. And he had another one at 620 South Spring Street. But the main one was the one on West Sixth and the 333.

TAPE NUMBER: III, SIDE TWO

MAY 20, 1974

GARDNER: Do you want to pick up with Mr. Holmes?

EPSTEIN: Yes. He bought perhaps 75 percent of all the old books that were sold in the city. He had been here--oh, I think he was a contemporary of Mr. Dawson, almost, in years of service. I think Dawson was here first. But Holmes learned his business--he and his brother--in San Francisco, and he came down here. As I mentioned, he reacted sometimes like he was a mean man, and in some ways he was. His career ended unfortunately, simply because he couldn't trust people. He wouldn't trust people. He ran all these businesses, and he tried to keep them up all by himself. He had one assistant whom he did depend on but who left him a number of years later. And I think from there on he went downhill. He survived the Depression not too badly. There were a lot of books, and he used to supply to libraries. Instead of going out to sell libraries, his stock was so vast that libraries would come to him to buy. He just had an accumulation. They were reasonably well put on shelves where people could see them. He avoided the mistakes of some of the others. And he would run auction sales. There was an auctioneer here, Charles Nash, who used to run sales for him. He would buy remainders and take an empty store on, say, West Sixth Street or Hill Street or Broadway and run

an auction for five, six months. He would buy cheap sets and cheap dictionaries. It did well for a while, then like all things of that type, people catch on that it's really no bargain, that they can get the same thing somewhere else. They would start the auction figure, pull a figure out of the air, of the real retail price, and then move on up from that.

His business methods as far as getting along with his contemporaries were horrible. He would go in to buy a lot of books, and if he didn't get them and the person selling them happened to mention, "Well, I'll go and get another bid," he would send one of his men out there immediately to say, "Well, I'm the other bidder," and try to pull tactics such as that. Or if he walked into a home and found another bookseller already there bidding on it, he would tell the person the minute he walked in, "I'll give ten dollars more than he will"--no matter what you would bid, tactics such as that. He would say that he was an official of a bank, an official appraiser or something like that. There was no limit to what he wouldn't do to do the other person out of a library--which was pretty small; and he was recognized as a small man in many ways by his employees, none of whom ever gave him any loyalty, and by all his competitors; and even a lot of his customers refused to continue to do business with him because he would treat customers meanly from time

to time, too.

GARDNER: How strange.

EPSTEIN: Gradually he was circumscribed in his own circle of lack of character. And it affected his mind. I don't know what affected his mind.

GARDNER: This is all very Dickensian.

EPSTEIN: Later on, before he died, he lost his mind. One of the curious things is [that] about a year before he closed out his business, he called me up. And he said, "Louis, how would you like to buy my stock?" So Ed Stackhouse--and I'll have to bring in a lot about Ed Stackhouse--and I went to see him. (Ed Stackhouse used to work for him before he came to work for me. Of course, he never liked that. But he and I always got along fairly well. I'll tell you a little personal story about that.) Stack and I went out, and we looked over the things he had in his basement and upstairs. We thought, well, the mass of it was worth perhaps about $18- to $20,000 to us. But before we spoke our figure, we asked him what he wanted. He said, "$27,000." Well, we wouldn't pay $27,000 because it wasn't that good of a buy. And a lot of the stuff he had was duplication of stuff we had--at the time we had the old bookshop still--and then it would be a problem where in the heck to put all that mass. Well, then we told him no and came out with the biggest offer we would pay, and we got up to $20,000. And

then our negotiations broke off. Three months later, he sold the whole thing for $8,000. He was ashamed to call Stack and myself back to renegotiate. It was beneath his pride. He would rather give it away to someone else. And then he gave other concessions. He gave him the right to run a sale there.

GARDNER: Who was it? Do you recall?

EPSTEIN: Dale. Harry Dale. And Harry Dale picked up the best deal he ever made in his life. He ran the sale right there; he didn't move it. We probably would have run a sale, too. And he got rid of about $30-40,000 worth of books in one or two months. And he ran a sale properly. First he called in the dealers, 50 percent off. Of course, he said he called in the dealers, but anybody who wanted to walk in had the same deal--which was all right. But he had himself a windfall. What I'm telling you about is the character of Holmes. His pride wouldn't let him call Louis Epstein and Stackhouse back because he at one time was the peer and I was the smallest bookman in the area. And he used to come by my store in the very early days when I was on Sixth Street--as long as I was on Sixth Street--and he'd stop almost every day. I think I mentioned he used to go to lunch at a certain cafeteria on Hill Street where he ate. And on the way back he would come by picking his teeth, and stop in and say hello to me, and look around, and buy a book

here and there. Of course, I realized that any dealer who bought a book from me was probably getting it as a bargain. It was buying it at a wholesale price, because he had to sell it. Observing, listening, I learned gradually that those books the dealers bought usually were worth more than what I had them priced. Which was all right--I marked them up at a profit so there was no hard feeling about it.

One time I asked him, "Mr. Holmes, how do you develop a big book business? How do you bring up sales?" You know, some days there on Sixth Street, if we took in two dollars, why, that was a day's business. And don't laugh at that. That happened. So Mr. Holmes replied, "Well, Louis, I'll tell you. You buy the best books you can find, on any subject. Mark them reasonably and put them on your shelf. And during the day you'll sell one of this subject and one of another subject and one of another subject, and you'll never know which one you're going to sell in advance. And at the end of the day you'll have a few bucks in your pocket." This is literally true. Of course, you learn the refinements. You know that some books will definitely sell, and other books, [it's] always problematical whether they'll ever sell in a hundred years on your shelf. Certain staple things, people call for on various subjects.

But I mentioned a little personal thing. I mentioned the other day about the librarian--I talked about getting

a list from the Burbank Public Library, and working on that list in my own stock, and then going around to the various other bookstores. And one of the bookstores I went to was Holmes. Now, one of the things he would never do was allow another bookseller to browse through his shelves. There was that extreme jealousy. Whereas any other bookseller, you were welcome; and if you paid the price, fine. And if you got a sleeper once in a while, well, that was your good luck. [tape stopped] I was telling you, I was working the list of the stores at Holmes, and I came there one Sunday morning hoping that he wouldn't be there because I knew the assistant, and I'm sure he would have let me work the list. But Holmes was there, and I saw him. I said, "Mr. Holmes"--everyone called him Mr. Holmes (well, he was so much older than we, it was a matter of respect, respect for a person that you really didn't respect too much)--and I told him that I had this list from a library who had been buying back East. And I convinced her to let me have her list, give us a try. I said, "I know that you've got a lot of these books on your shelf. Every bookstore has some. And I would like your permission to go through the shelves." (Aaron was with me. Aaron was six or seven years old at the time, just about. It was Sunday, so I took him along; I told Ann, Mrs. E, that I wouldn't be more than a few hours.

I purposely went down to work his shop because he was open on Sunday. None of the others were.) "Well," he said, "you know I don't like to have dealers go through my stock." I said, "I understand your policy. You've broken it for me a couple of times before." "Well," he said, "I did it for you." I impressed on him that some other city was going to sell these books if I didn't sell them. Why not let us sell the books and keep this customer, tie her back in Los Angeles where she belongs. So he finally agreed. Then I looked around. I went through his essay list, quickly through his fiction list--primarily the essay list which I was looking at, some fiction, some basic things--and I gathered them all together, a truckful of books. And we got together. He would come by and put in a word here and there. And something about the whole deal softened him up a little bit towards me. When we got all finished, I let him know if he had time I'd go over it with him. Number one, he gave me 20 percent off, which was extremely unusual. If he would sell me a book ever, it was always at his list price. He didn't want to give any dealer discount. Well, there were a lot of them--perhaps 100 or maybe 125 books. But something softened him up. He had seen me so often up and down the street that we really became friends, in a sense. Then he started talking with me. He saw Aaron with me, and started talking about his family relations. He said, "You know, I never had a

family relationship. I made the mistake of working seven days a week all day long and never took one daughter anywhere or spent any time with my family. And I lost all my family relationship," he said. "I don't have any anymore." He was still living with the family, but he saw this. He saw Aaron following me around; I told him I had to run home and so forth. He made that remark. And he was a very unhappy man. I'm sure his own conduct made him that way. He was so small in so many ways. When we were opening up the Argonaut in January 1933--January 1, 1933. . . .

This is an aside. I'll have to divert way back. That's a story I'll have to tell you apart from this. But at any rate, when I tell you that we moved the stock of books from Long Beach to Sixth Street to open the Argonaut on January 1, 1933--New Year's Day--don't ask me where the books come from. Ask me that later. That's another story entirely.

My father happened to be there. A truck brought the stuff in from Long Beach. And my father was outside--I don't know why he was there that particular day. Well, it was New Year's Day; it was a holiday. He even closed the store in Boyle Heights that day. So Mr. Holmes walked by. And his store was open--on New Year's Day. Mind you, he wouldn't take a day off for anything. He didn't take his family anywhere--not he. He walked by, and I introduced him to my father. He said to my father, "You know,

Mr. Epstein, you've got a wonderful son there. He's doing very well." And I thought that was a very nice compliment. The way he said it was very friendly. I respected certain things about him, and I'm sure he respected my industry or whatever it was and my progress, because he was probably more friendly to me than he was to most people. So that's the story of Mr. Holmes in a nutshell, you might say. But for years he distributed a lot of books. And if you measure it on that basis, he probably sold more books in Los Angeles than anybody.

GARDNER: That's fascinating.

EPSTEIN: And aside from his character, aside from his way of doing business, he did sell books, just in masses.

Then there was another store operating at that time called Powner's. Powner's Bookstore. Now Powner had a store in Chicago. He opened a store here. He had a daughter who married one of his people named Mac Gordon. Mac Gordon, I will come to later--the Satyr Bookshop in Hollywood. That will relate. Mac Gordon ran Powner's for him here in Los Angeles. They had a very large used-book store. And Powner's used to publish a few Masonic things and a few pamphlets and things like that. They were progressive, and they'd been here for quite a few years before I started. That was one of the big stores I used to go into. As a matter of fact, when I first came here, I think Powner's was the first bookstore in Los Angeles I walked into, simply

because I happened to be going by Spring Street. At that time, they were at 542 South Spring. Later they opened a store on Olive Street--several years later--but it didn't last long on Olive Street.

But there was dissension in the staff. They didn't give Mac Gordon enough authority to really run the place. The authority was diffuse. When that's done, as often happens, it will wreck a business. They were 90 percent in the old-book business. [telephone rings; tape stopped] I want to get Powner's on record. Mac Gordon--"Mac" is the name he was always called by. I forget what his real first name was; there's a record of it somewhere. (Nicholas McDowell Gordon) He later started the Satyr Bookshops. And the Satyr Bookshops will bring on another story. See, this business is like an ever-growing plant. You kill a root somewhere here, and it springs up somewhere else--which is a great thing. The book business has a unity that goes all through it.

And then, to leave the Mac Gordon till a while later, there was Olen W. Smith, who ran a law-book store. The business is still running. I think they're on Second near Broadway--or a block away, because the Los Angeles Times bought that whole block and they had to move. He, too, had worked for Powner at one time. He and Mac Gordon used to run the place. Now, these are the actual people in 1925.

I myself didn't start till '26.

GARDNER: So this is the setting into which you came.

EPSTEIN: Right. There was a place on West Seventh Street called A.E. Little. West Seventh Street at that time was one of the exclusive shopping streets. Robinson's was the beautiful store at that time, and there were a few fine shops along West Seventh and a few on Flower. At one time that area was destined to be the fine shopping center of Los Angeles, but things didn't work out that way. But Little also had a store on South Broadway. They specialized in fine stationery. And the reason I mention them is that they carried a very good children's-book department. They specialized in children's books. They had gifts, stationery, and I suppose as part of the gifts they had the best children's-book lines--not necessarily the biggest department, but very fine children's books. But they had one woman there who was a very good book person.

GARDNER: Who was that? Do you remember her name?

EPSTEIN: I have it somewhere jotted down. I may have to fill in. . . . (Miss Jessie Thomas)

GARDNER: We can fill that in later.

EPSTEIN: She later went to work for Vroman's in Pasadena. She was a contemporary--I guess she was a little older than I. Now deceased. After Little's closed up, like so many fine places closed up during the Depression, I was on Eighth Street and I bought a lot of books from them. In addition

to fine children's books, they carried a small line of fine bindings and specialized things. One of the things I bought from them was a special edition of Candide signed by Rockwell Kent. At any rate, that would be history, because they traded with all the fine people in the area.

The other old-book sellers of consequence was Lofland and Russell. They were on Sixth Street in the 700 block. That was between Hope and Flower. And they had a pretty good used-book store. But off the record--leave it in the tape--in those days it was off the record, [laughter] that they handled erotica, which of course was extremely scarce in those days. They had a little bit of an underground business in that. But Lofland was a pretty good bookseller. Russell was, too, for that matter. But you see, they were all experienced by the time I started. But the two partners split up. About ten years after I first met them, they split up.

GARDNER: And what happened to them?

EPSTEIN: Lofland's business kept on going. Apparently Lofland kept the business. Russell started the bookstore for a while and then dropped out. He was not a very good businessman, whereas Lofland was. But Lofland sold out his stock of books later to someone else, and Harry Wepplo ran it for the new buyer--because Harry was telling people that he had bought it out, but everyone knowing Harry knew that

Harry would never have five dollars to his name to buy anything, because whatever money he got a hold of he always spent. And Harry Wepplo later had a little shop in the Farmer's Market. Harry Wepplo will come into the history of the Pickwick, too, a little later. I'm trying to keep these . . .

GARDNER: Keep the threads alive.

EPSTEIN: . . . little tickets on these things. Let's see, we mentioned Jones was selling out at the time, and we mentioned the Hollywood Bookstore, and we mentioned Campbell's, and we mentioned California Book Company. For the sake of just mentioning a store for the record, Neville Book Company was a curious mixture of cheap new books and odds and ends of secondhand books at 356 South Spring Street. Stratford and Green I mentioned to you was being auctioned off. The Natick Bookstore, or Nătick--however, people pronounce it both ways--at 104 West First, was in the Natick block, a very famous old building in the city. And they had gifts and a few books. But they later went out. I mentioned Fowler's and I mentioned Campbell's.

Oh, yes. A brother-in-law of Mr. Dawson was a chap by the name of [Warren] Rogers. And he had a bookstore, I should say, at 622 West Sixth Street--at that time I'm speaking of, in 1925--which happens to be immediately across the street from where I started in 1926. I could look into his door and count the number of customers he had. He later

moved to 711 West Sixth Street in 1931. There's a story about Mr. Rogers. I spoke to him, incidentally, just a little while ago. He went out of the book business and had a hard time finding something, so he went to work for the post office. And he's now retired. He's in the real estate business.

As I said, when I opened across the street from him, I had a little tiny shop, and his had a narrow front--not much wider than mine, but in the back it opened out. It was a six-, seven-, eight-story building, so the front was narrowed because of the elevators, and he was part of the front entrance to the building. And after the elevator shaft, his store angled back of the store, so he had quite a large store in back. He used to put out sets of books. And they would sell like anything. I couldn't sell sets. He had a chap there by the name of Ingraham. He was really a crackerjack salesman.

But one thing about Mr. Rogers. He used to come in occasionally, buy something from me; I'd stop in and say hello, look around. And we'd exchange knowledge. (I was always picking up little bits and pieces of knowledge and somebody else's experience.) But he had a register which he said could tell him at the end of the day exactly how much his net worth was, how much his inventory was worth, how much profit he made that day. Of course, it's a very simple

system. What he did was put a cost on every book that he bought, the secondhand books. And he did it this way: he paid x number of dollars for the lot of books. He would go through his books and mark off the better books. When he came to the x number of dollars he paid for it, he put a cost on each of his better books. And when the cost on the better books equalled the total amount of what he paid for them, then he would put down the value of all the rest of his buy as zero. He would attribute the cost to his better books--which is not a bad system. But he spent so much time with his bookkeeping that he neglected other kinds of business that he might do. And it was my idea, it was my thought, that that would ruin him. He would spend a half a morning or a morning going over all his tapes and what each book cost. In the end, it really didn't make much difference if he sold it, no matter what it cost. If he didn't sell, he had to reduce it. So he would have to distribute his cost. At any rate, it was my idea that Warren Rogers failed not because he couldn't do business, [but] because he didn't allow himself enough time to pursue other areas of business that he might have had, because he spent so much time knowing how good his profits were at any one day. In my book, in those days, the profits were what I had left at the end of the month. The inventory I had meant nothing to me, because I knew if I ever had to

break it up and sell it, it would bring very little. I mean, theoretically, that's the basis. So on that basis we never worried too much about our inventory. We marked our books what we thought we could get for them. And curiously enough, Dawson's used the same system. And I think the Dawson boys still use it.

GARDNER: As what, as Rogers [used]?

EPSTEIN: Rogers. Rogers learned it from Dawson. But Rogers adapted it to a different kind of business, whereas Dawson's used to deal in high-priced things. And Dawson had a bookkeeper, a staff of bookkeepers to do that. Mr. Dawson would never sit down and do it. His time and energy was worth more than that.

Well, anyway, Mr. Rogers was a very fine person. I learned a lot from him. But I merely tell that story--that's my idea. Now, someone may disagree with me over that. But this all happened in the Depression, and stores were going out anyway. But a lot of stores weathered the Depression, and maybe Mr. Rogers would have, too, if he were more an aggressive businessman. But as a person, he was a very fine person, [and is] to this day. I talked to him just a few weeks ago because the widow of an employee of mine, a black person living in a black neighborhood, wants to sell her house. And I told her a number of years ago she should never sign anything without consulting me or my son. She

just doesn't know what to sign and what not to sign. Well, someone, an agent, came to her house and wanted to sign her up to sell her house, and she called me. I said, "Don't sign. If they press you to sign, you just press that much harder back, because anyone urging you has an ulterior motive. They don't give you time to think." I asked her if she knew anything about this person, and she said no, she didn't. Well, in the meantime, Mr. Rogers had come into the shop on Hollywood Boulevard just a few months ago and asked about me. He knew I was out, but he wanted to know how I was getting along, wanted to know if I stopped in there once in a while, and of course they told him I did. So he left his card. So when I went down to the shop, they gave me the card, and I called him up and told him I was pleased to hear from him, I'm glad he asked about me. And he told me he was in the real estate business. And he operates in the Crenshaw area. So I got Mr. Rogers to give a listing to that woman.

GARDNER: And it all worked out happily ever after for everyone, right?

EPSTEIN: Well, the house did not get sold; this just happened. But I mean, the thing winds around. Thirty-five, forty-five years ago, and here you come back--we're recommending him as a real estate man.

Let me see if I covered the names of the Hollywood

people. I mentioned Leonard's; I told you about the Hollywood Bookstore; we went through Unity Pegue. There was another person there by the name of Esme--well, Esme Ward I think came to Hollywood a little later, in 1927. It's noon. You want to knock off? [tape recorder turned off]

GARDNER: Well, we're back after lunch, and if you'd like to sum up the list, continue.

EPSTEIN: Practically all the previous names I mentioned were active in the business in what you might call a predawn-Louis Epstein era. I came in the spring of '26 into this situation. And obviously there were many more smaller shops, both new and old, which I did not mention.

GARDNER: But you got most of the important ones, I think.

EPSTEIN: I'm quite sure I got all of the important ones of that period, no question about that. Now, here comes the early part of 1926, probably around May. We rent this store from the McCarty brothers--or McCarty Company; they were brothers, which I mentioned before--at 625 West Sixth. My first ad appears in the September issue of the 1926 phone book. And it reads like: "Acadia Bookshop," the address, "wanted: rare and standard books, single volumes, sets. Complete libraries purchased. Open evenings." And the number was VAndike 5917. Curiously enough, if somebody had called me and offered me rare books or anything like

that, I probably would not have known what they were. I copied what the others were advertising for. But I learned fairly rapidly. The calls did start coming in; people did start bringing in things. Knowledgeable book people started coming in. As you may recollect, I mentioned that in Long Beach I never even discovered there was such a thing as a Publisher's Weekly, which is the trade paper, and which at that time carried all the books about old books, also, and all the news about old books. To me that was a great education--to have articles appear about old books, bibliographies of certain authors, occasionally prices brought at auction sales. It opened an entirely new world to me which I didn't know existed, really. You have no idea how ignorant I was of the book world--not only the book business, but the book world. It's an assumption which I verified later: that a person just getting out of college is a very ignorant person. And I was one of them. Now when I meet them, when I was hiring for the shop, I was often struck by how little they knew. What I should have done was to think back how little I knew when I was in that position. I don't think colleges and universities do enough for their students in the practical sense. There should be one course of at least half a year on how to get a job, what a job means, what an employee owes to an employer, what he should expect, what he should demand, and the minimum what he should give, plus

the unlimited maximum--but at least what the employer's entitled to, not only what they are entitled to. I don't intend that to be as a very conservative attitude, but I think it would be a great thing for the person himself. They just don't know--nobody ever told them--what work is. And people used to come and tell me they want a job in a bookstore because they think it's fun. I said, "If it's fun you want, don't come here. I make my people work very hard." And most of the time they really saw that I meant it and moved on. But they think that a job must be fun. No job is fun. I think some jobs are more enjoyable than others. But a job is a job; and you may like what you're doing, but it's still a job. And very often it interferes with what you would like to do. And it's not all fun. It can't be. Well, so much for that.

At any rate, then I moved into this world of books all around me. I must say that I think I learned fairly rapidly and went about my business, started building up a little store. The shelves were built. A lot of them weren't shelves at all, but apple boxes. I picked up a bookcase here and there. My brother-in-law came down and built a few shelves. And as business began to develop, I found a young man who lived at the Biola Institute. They had a hotel with the school. Although he was not with the school, he lived at the hotel. A young man by the name of [Harry] Gardiner,

incidentally, only he spelled it the German way, G-a-r-d-i-n-e-r. A very fine young man. He was handy, and he did all my carpenter work for several years while he was still around. He replaced all my apple boxes with shelves and made the store look a little bit respectable.

The things I handled as I mentioned to you, were, oh, magazines, magazines you hardly ever see anymore. They were short-story magazines, Western magazines, love-story magazines. There were a few literary magazines, but mostly the popular magazines--[National] Geographics and things of that nature--which we sold for five and ten cents and which I bought for two and three cents from the Goodwill, Salvation Army, and places such as that or people would bring them in. And there would be a regular trade in that. They would bring in books, and I would pick up books from the Goodwill or furniture stores wherever I went; and then later I became more sophisticated and went to better places and got better books and actual libraries. And from time to time I would get a call. A person had a library to sell, and I'd go out and I'd buy them. Very often I would bump into other dealers at the sale, and it became a question of bidding. As I mentioned to you, some of the competitors weren't totally honest about it. After they were turned down once, they would send somebody else in their shop and say, "Well, I'm the other bookstore," and work on that, say. I

mentioned to you about Mr. Holmes: he would pop in and say, "I'll give you ten dollars more than anybody else, no matter what the bid is"--which was, of course, ridiculous. On one occasion, a woman threw Mr. Holmes out. She said, "I don't like those tactics." And she was smart enough to see that it was an unfair tactic. Many times: "Well, this man is offering ten dollars more"; so what do you do? You offer ten dollars more, then he offers ten dollars more. You never know when he's liable to drop it off, so you can't go ahead and fight him on that. But, looking back, it wasn't all that bad. I was still a single man. In the first few months I made very little, if anything, but later on it got so that I could pay my room and board at home. I was still living with my parents in Boyle Heights on Brittania Street and beginning to build up the stock, which was actual build-up of money--net worth, you might say; money was always scarce. The competitors, as I mentioned before, I think were very nice to me. They taught me a lot. They taught me a lot. I think one of the reasons was probably because I listened a lot. Unlike now. [laughter]

GARDNER: Well, maybe you could continue now--because I think we've talked about much of the time you spent in this first store, the Acadia--and get the years up to date with some of the new bookstores added.

EPSTEIN: Yes, we'll do that. That was the year that Stratford and Green finally went out. Stratford and Green was in business for a long, long time, the early pioneers. And that was the year also that I think Jones finally closed up their store.

GARDNER: Could you talk about Stratford and Green? What sort of shop was that?

EPSTEIN: Well, see, if you recollect, I didn't come to the city until 1923. So when I had been to Stratford and Green, they had a large store, mostly new books, and they also had stationery supplies. And they were gradually drifting more into stationery. Their management interests had become stationery rather than books. Well, I don't know much background about the firm, but they apparently didn't do well, and they were going out of business. They ran a big sale, and finally they auctioned off whatever was left. I bought quite a few books from them when they were running the sale. I'd go down there almost every other day in the morning and find out what they had marked down. Even in my ignorance I recognized some things that I could sell for more than they were offering it at. It was a good education for me. I got familiar with the new books that were being offered. I used to go to the May Company sales. They used to have remainder sales in those days. They were quite a lot different from what they are today. I used to

buy books there. They used to have some beautiful sales; they would have remainders. And I learned that remainders don't last forever, so although a book may remainder today. . . .

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GARDNER: You mentioned also that Jones went out of business in that year. Was that the same sort of operation?

EPSTEIN: Jones was one of the oldest bookstores in the city. Oh, I think they started before the century. They were the place where everybody bought schoolbooks, and they also had a lot of trade books. They had a very unfortunate experience which cost them a lot of money, I think, [and] which induced them to dissolve the business. A schoolteacher was accused of stealing. And they made a terrible mistake; she had not stolen anything. And she sued them and got quite a verdict. But then other things began to happen to them. The original owners turned over management to other people. There were a group of three or four people in the store who were getting fantastically high salaries for those days, and the business just didn't warrant it. None of those getting the highest salaries would give up their salaries or leave, even when they saw that the business was going on the rocks. Maybe instead of three or four people getting $10- to $20,000, $15,000 a year in those days, if they had had one or two, they might have salvaged themselves. But their credit got so with the publishers that no one would ship them anymore; so they went out. It was an ongoing business for--Lord knows, it must

have been forty or fifty years. It was way before the turn of the century. I don't know whether they were older than Fowler or not. Fowler might have been older. But Fowler's dates back to the late eighties--the original Fowler firm. Up to a few years after I started, while I was still on Eighth Street, I used to come into Fowler's and still see an old man coming in once or twice a week for a while--one of the original founders.

There was a chap by the name of John Q. Burch who had a business in one of the buildings. He sold nothing but books about shells and nature books. And nobody every heard of him. I didn't know about him till later. At the time I went in business, I didn't know him. I later became acquainted with him because he used to sell a lot of antiquarian shell and nature books, plus a lot of new ones. Later he moved to somewhere around the Leimert Park area. I think he ran his business from his home.

There was a chap by the name of Dellquest who had a store a little further away from downtown on West Seventh Street around the 1800 block. He was a pretty good bookman. But he never mixed with the other bookstores. As I recollect, he also dealt with stamps and coins and things like that. He later wrote a book on collecting stamps. But he never mixed much with the general trade. I recollect that once or twice I found books about the South in his place. I

think his origin was the South, and his interest was there.

There was a chap on South Olive Street by the name of R.C. Lord. He had a very small store. He used to do a lot of freelancing plus running the store. He used to sell a lot of books to other dealers. He didn't have much in the way of a trade or a following of his own. He was a nice person, but a limited businessman, you might say. (I don't know how else to express it.)

Then the Satyr Bookshop, about that time, opened on Vine Street. Now, the Satyr Bookshop is quite a story. No, they were not on Vine Street. At that time, 1926, Mac Gordon started the Satyr Bookshop on Hudson Avenue. It wasn't until several years later that he moved to Vine Street. Then he got into partnership with Stanley Rose--for the moment I'll just pass that story by and get him down to starting about that time.

This is more or less chronological. Then we move into 1927. About the only new name that I could recognize of any note was Esme Ward. It's not too far from the block of the Pickwick, at 6627, 6600 block. She had a circulating library and retail bookstore. But it was a very nice library. In those days, circulating libraries were very important. The circulating libraries in Hollywood used to loan books on a circulating library basis to studios for

for reading. Some of the studios, instead of buying a book, would rent them--for the readers to read. It was mostly novels. There were several places in the area that were doing that.

We'll skip to early 1928. The Bible Institute Bookroom was around the corner from me on Hope Street, 558 South Hope, which was at Sixth. And then there was a chap by the name of I.E. Chadwick who called himself the Connoisseur Bookshop. I.E. Chadwick was a movie producer of sorts. And he later was very much involved with the studios in some ways. He had a piece of property on Sunset Boulevard which he rented out to studio people. His widow's still living, and she belongs to our temple. We see her quite often. His name was Isaac E. Chadwick. She always called him Chaddy. And she always tells me, "You know, Chaddy always used to tell me how proud he was" of me, the way I built up my business and so forth. This is nice to hear, very nice. And he had a sort of a specialized first-edition business. I don't think he was a great bookman, but at least he showed an interest for fine books and nice books.

GARDNER: Where was he?

EPSTEIN: He was at 6080 Sunset, which was just east of Gower right around the corner from Columbia. He owned the building there. He had several good rentals. And of course now that Columbia's shut down, I don't know what his rentals

are. But he left his widow well provided for; she doesn't seem to worry.

I note this just for the record. There was a Jewish bookstore on North Soto Street operated by Reverend E. Mirsky. E. Mirsky was quite a scholarly man. He didn't do much practicing of being a rabbi at the time, but at least it was a start towards Jewish books in the area. Mostly there were a great many Yiddish books, and of course prayer books and things of that nature, and some authors of Hebrew literature and Yiddish literature, and dictionaries of one kind or another. It wasn't till some years later that another Jewish bookstore opened up, which I would like to put down. I think I have a note to come to it.

We're getting into 1928 now. And as you know, in 1928 I sold the Acadia and opened the Louis Epstein Bookshop West Eighth Street. There were a lot of things happening at that time. The new-book business was burgeoning out. The department stores were doing the big business. Every department store, four department stores, you might say: Bullock's, Broadway, May Company, and Robinson's. Robinson's, as I mentioned before, was the high-class store in the area. They had a beautiful book department. And it was being run by a chap named Phil Kubel. He was a good bookman. He used to go to Europe every year to buy fine bindings--some rare first editions, but mostly bindings of individual

titles, special books of poetry, the standard poets--and occasionally bring home limited editions. And he had a very fine selection of rare books of that type--limited editions and fine bindings, but not rare books in the sense that he would have an early Mark Twain or anything like that, not in the sense that Dawson had rare books. There was the May Company, which had a good book department on one of the upper floors. They didn't move the department downstairs until a couple of years later. That was run by a woman whose name I don't remember now. But it was not in the class of Robinson's. But they did have a lot of good remainders on sale. Then there was Bullock's, which had a very fine book department also, very extensive stock; and that was run by a woman by the name of June Cleveland. And Pearl Goldwater worked for her. I don't know if you know Pearl Goldwater. Well, Pearl Goldwater ran that department at Bullock's for many years after June Cleveland. Then she left, and she went to work for Hunter's when they opened up the store in Beverly Hills. Then there was the Broadway. I knew who ran that store later, but I don't recollect who ran it at the time. Jake Zeitlin worked for Bullock's at the time. But with the exception of the May Company, they were all ground-floor departments, with extensive stocks, far different than they are today. They controlled the new-book business then, in the sense that they did the major

portion of it. Fowler and Parker were still doing good business and the Hollywood people were doing business, but nowhere near the volume that the department stores did, especially Robinson's. That, of course, would take days of telling by someone who knew the people then.

Also, skipping back to 1926, that was the year the library moved to its present quarters. And I remember watching, from my little store on Sixth Street, the trucks, Bekins trucks, just loaded with boxes, boxes of books backing up to the library on the Hope Street side and delivering the books there. It was an amazement to me how many trucks there were--of equipment, of course, and the books.

GARDNER: Did they buy more books to stock the library?

EPSTEIN: Their budget grew and they bought--oh, yes, they increased their assortment of books tremendously after they got in there.

GARDNER: Well, I know that, but I mean immediately afterwards, did they go out to the bookmen of the area and say, "We have all this extra room now"?

EPSTEIN: Not in that sense, but the bookmen used to bring books to them. For instance, if I felt there was something special in a library I bought, I would make a note of it or take the book up there and offer it to them. Also, they had a box of wants, cards of books they needed, and I would go up there. I didn't do it when I was on Sixth Street, but I

did do it when I moved to Eighth Street after a year or two. I was a little too timid or too new, number one, to know about it, and thinking that, well, I wouldn't have anything they wanted. But later on as my stock increased, I used to go and watch their want list. And very often I'd see things appear on the want list that we had picked up, and we would offer it to them. We established a nice relationship with the people running it. Sometimes I would offer them things by the phone as they came in. Maybe somethings I bought very new: somebody would bring me in review copies; I would call them up; if they didn't have it, they would buy it. And the library, of course, brought more book people into the area: the people who used the library for reference, professional people, and also the casual reading public. And people who belonged to a library at the same time would be buying books. We never considered the library as a danger to our business because they loaned books for free. The axiom in the book trade is that a good book town will have a good library; and vice-versa, a good library will have good bookstores in the same town. They sort of supplement each other. They both promote the reading of books. Well, where do we go from here?

GARDNER: Well, you're up to 1928. What I'd like to do is cover the years between 1928 and 1933 and then tell the story of Argonaut and how that started. So if you'd like

to continue with the atmosphere. In 1928 you're opened up at Louis Epstein's.

EPSTEIN: Well, in 1928, as I mentioned to you, Ralph Howey came along and bought my store, the Acadia. I took the opportunity of taking the money and traveling around a little bit. I went to Phoenix and San Francisco and the towns along the coast--Santa Barbara. Wherever I went, I made a looking tour and a book-looking tour. I'd never been to San Francisco. I'd never been up the coast and never been in the [Imperial] Valley. So it was a lark. I went by myself. I found a few books here and there. And as I say, I was still living with my parents in Boyle Heights. And I'd ship the books in or bring them in the car and loaded up a room with maybe 1,000 books or so, maybe a little more. And then I got a hankering to go back into the business. I fully intended to go back into the business because I liked it. I'd really established a fondness for it. There was a lot to attract you to the business once you went in. It needs a certain type of character--the love of the search. It's sort of a gamble--you buy, you might sell at a big price--and you're playing with people, buying and selling. There's a mechanics of wits with one another. People try to get the most they can, and you try to buy at the least you can. And some people want to take advantage of you, and other people want to give you something for free. It's all happening. And

then the constant rubbing of elbows with the competition of a sort, with all your contemporaries in the trade. Although we were constantly competing, there was for the most part a friendly type of competition, with the exception of persons I mentioned.

GARDNER: At this time there would be no organizations of any kind.

EPSTEIN: There was none at that time.

GARDNER: So whatever contact there was was really contact that you had to go out of your way for, or just incidental contact going for the libraries.

EPSTEIN: Amongst the secondhand-book dealers, they were always searching each others' stocks. They always had want lists to fill, or they'd come in and try to find something. I had a customer for one kind of a book, and I went out looking for that kind of book for him. Or they wanted a book on duckhunting. If I got a new customer and he wanted a book on duckhunting, I'd run through all the other stores and try to find out what they had in duckhunting. I would either buy it or make a note and quote it to the person. Or whatever subject you might name. There are just millenia of subject classifications in the book business: books on needlework, books on--well, it's like one man on shells. One man was collecting books on scrimshaw. Now scrimshaw's popular. In those days scrimshaw was collected but not to

the extent that it is today. And seafaring books and forest books. I mean, any subject you pull out of the air, there were some collectors for it--besides the regular book reader who wanted to keep up with current reading.

We moved and played with each other, in the sense that there was always a communication. It was all very, very good. We would sometimes see a book on another man's shelf marked ten dollars. I had a man who would give me ten dollars for it, but I said, "Look, if I pay you, I can't get more than ten dollars. I'll give you seven and a half," or "I'll give you five," or "I'll give you six." And sometimes he'd take it and sometimes not. If we could buy that and maybe make a quick couple of dollars, we would do that. It was an ongoing thing, to--not bargain with each other but let's use the word "trade" with each other. Or sometimes we would offer, "Look, I'll give you ten dollars. You want ten dollars in cash? I'll give you fifteen dollars in trade out of my stock. I don't have any cash." He would come in and pick out fifteen dollars' worth of books. And very often that kind of a barter would go, especially with people like myself or some of the other smaller dealers who didn't have cash but had a customer who might want it. We'd always take the risk, and sometimes I'd get it and the customer wouldn't want it. And there I was, with that book on

the shelf instead of the other. But it was a normal thing to do, and you were supposed to be smart enough to know what you were doing. As far as any organization at that time, there was none.

I think I told you about the story that just about that time, Jake left working in the department store and opened his own little shop. I used to go downtown, browse through the stores, and I'd meet the people, my former customers, browsers in my store. We'd stop and talk. One day Jake said to me that he was opening a shop, and we got to talking. I said, "Well, I've been picking up some books." So we arranged that he came over to my home to see the books. And there were a few things, most of which he said he'd like to put in his stock because he didn't have hardly any stock. He was on Hope Street; he was across the street from Biola. He wasn't on Sixth Street. The entrance was through a building that was on the corner of Hope and Sixth. And his whole shop consisted of what was formerly an opening to this hotel and a little lobby. Now, what happened to the other portion of the hotel, I don't recollect now--whether they abandoned the upstairs or not. Or maybe they made a narrower entrance to it and rented out that little lobby portion. So I loaned Jake the books, and we made a list of them. And when he sold them, I was supposed to get two-thirds and he would keep one-third. Occasionally

we'd get together, and he'd give me a few bucks.

Then in the late summer of '28 I opened up my store. I went to Jake, and I said, "I'm opening a store on Eighth Street, and I need my stock." Well, Jake was a little put out about it. He said, "I can't give you my stock; I won't have anything on my shelves!" I said, "Now, wait a minute, Jake. I told you at the time that I would need it when I opened my store." "Well," he says, "I didn't anticipate that you'd need it that soon." Well, of course he eventually gave them to me with no hard feelings, but he was a little disturbed about it and pleaded with me could I leave it if I had a lot of other books. I said, "I don't have a lot of other books, and I need something as an opening stock to attract customers."

So we opened there, but that store had been occupied as a bookstore and stationery store by one of the relatives, a younger relative, of someone who was connected with Stratford and Green. He had mostly some stationery. So I heard he was moving out, and so I went to him and confirmed it. And then I went to his landlord and I said that I would like to take the store when he moved out. So when he moved out I bought some of his shelving and a few tables and other things. I picked up an old cash register. The other register I had left to Ralph Howey.

From there on, from the time I opened the Eighth Street

store, I was never out of the book business again up until the time I retired. It was slow going to start with, but gradually my shelves filled up and people discovered the shop. You see, when I moved into Sixth Street, I moved right into the thick of the book area, whereas Eighth Street was two blocks away. At that time I was the only bookseller on Eighth Street. My closest bookseller was Mr. Lord, right around the corner on Olive Street. And this was between Olive and Grand, on the south side of the street. The location now is occupied, I believe, by Henry's [Camera] photographic equipment company. And for many years I used to drive by, and my little sign was still on the wall--"Louis Epstein's Bookshop."

It was eventful in the sense that I was learning more and more rapidly, my stock was building up, and I was doing a little bit better business. And by the time 1929 came around, getting ready to get married, I'd established a business that I felt would support us. I might have gotten married a little bit sooner, but I was really fearful to take a bride and not be able to support her. Not that Ann would have minded going to work, but I didn't want any of that. I saw in my own family, where my father and mother always worked--and my mother always worked. She always worked. She helped in the store, and we lived upstairs or lived in the back; and she would cook and sew and clean and

bake and wash and still had to work hours in the store when my dad was out. My thinking at that time was, well, look, I don't want to start that, because once you have a wife coming into the business, you become dependent on her. No one else can do it, and it's hard to make a decision to substitute her with an employee: number one, the expense; and number two, you don't think the employee will do as well. I've seen it happen too often. Well, at any rate, I did not do it. Ann never worked in the store until we moved our business to Hollywood, and then the children were pretty well able to take care of themselves. She would come in maybe around lunchtime to help out, and then she got to liking it so well that she came of her own volition to help out whether we asked for her or not or needed her or not.

I had one part-time assistant by the name of Dickson L. Shelton, who had been a customer of mine on Sixth Street. I met him on the street one day between stores, and I told him I was thinking of opening up a store. And he asked me if I needed any help. He having been a customer, buying first editions and living off an income, I figured, well, I can't offer him anything that might be attractive to him; and so I told him that. And he said, "Well, I need something to do. I'm just tired of having twenty-four hours a day just going around looking through bookstores." And he said, "I don't have as much income as you think." I

said, "Well, I'll tell you what I'll pay, and if you're willing to do it." So I told him, and he said, "That's fine." He stayed with me for quite a number of years.

There were no great new developments in the number of people who came in at that time, with the exception of people who anyone might remember. Of course, Jake came in in that period, and Pat Hunt. Now, Pat Hunt had worked around in the department stores, and then she opened a little shop of her own. She later bought the Hollywood Bookstore and ran that for years. And then she sold it and then again opened up another little shop. And her last shop was not too far away from where the Pickwick is, where the Pickwick moved in later. She was at 6731, in that little building that Aaron owns now, that little arcade. Aaron, of course, made it into a much better-looking thing. But she had a little shop in that arcade. She was an excellent bookwoman. She was well known in the trade. And in the Hollywood trade, she sold a lot of books to a lot of movie stars, studios, and everyone else of that era.

In addition to that, in 1929 the Satyr Bookshop moved from Hudson to Vine Street. At that time Stanley Rose and Mac Gordon were partners, and they moved the store to Vine Street. They did exceptionally, exceptionally well. You'll have to remind me to come back to give you the story of that story, or shall I tell it to you now?

GARDNER: Tell it now.

EPSTEIN: Well, Stanley Rose and Mac Gordon were two quite different people. Stanley was a roistering type of guy, loved his liquor. Mac was a more solid businessman, feet on the ground. They got along fairly well at the start, but something happened between them. Stanley Rose republished a little book--or they republished it together, pirated an edition, of Chic Sale's, The Specialist--a very good-selling piece of curiosa (still in print). It was a little tiny book, sold for a dollar. It was about outhouses. And they were picked up on it and sued. Then something happened, and Stanley took all the rap for it. Actually, to pirate something is against the law. Stanley took the whole rap for all the proceedings; then they published something else. There was no criminality into this other, but then they published something else, a pirated thing, which was called obscene. So he had to actually spend a month or so in jail. When Stanley came out, he felt that he was not given the proper backing or proper treatment by Mac Gordon, that Mac didn't back him up for one reason or another. Well, anyway, they parted company.

But Stanley was an exceptional book salesman. He had entrée to any studio. He'd pack up a bag of books or a carful of books, go around from office to office of the writers, to the directors, to the business end--he would actually peddle books. But he had a personality which was

attractive; [he was] a nice talker, good drinking companion. When he broke up with Mac, he immediately started his own business, the Stanley Rose Bookshop. The other was the Satyr Bookshop. In a little while--he had a hard time getting backing, but somehow he got some backing--he opened a little store across the street from the Satyr, Stanley Rose's Bookshop. He was always short of funds. Well, he wound up owing the creditors, and the creditors took over and sold it to Mike Weisz. Mike Weisz at that time was the chap who bought any kind of a store and then ran it and made a sale out of it. He is the father of David Weisz, who runs these tremendous auctions. You see his ads in the paper--machinery, he'll buy fantastic plants. And the young David became an exceptionally wealthy person, very wealthy now. He will walk in and buy a plant for millions of dollars and then run these auctions and sell them off. He'll buy a steel company. There's nothing that he won't buy. He becomes knowledgeable and has experts handling them, and he built up a tremendous national business on that.

His father, Mike--and this goes back to a personal story of the family--was a small-time jobber of things. And very often he would buy things that my father was interested in. My father would buy from him, and they got to be friends. Mike was a gambler. (I'm saying this almost publicly, but

it was no secret; his family admits it, and everyone who knew Mike knows it.) I mentioned to his daughter-in-law, David's wife--one time we were sitting around together, and I was telling her the story about Mike and my father--that every time Mike would get in a hot spot, he'd come running around to my father for a couple of hundred dollars because he saw a lot of merchandise that he could buy but he didn't have the money. My father would loan it to him, and he'd pay him back. But he was always in trouble because he couldn't resist the gambling. And his daughter-in-law, I whispered to her, "You know, your father-in-law was a little bit of a gambler." She said to me, "A little bit of a gambler? You don't have to whisper to me. We know what kind of a gambler he was." But this goes around and around, one family meeting the other. Mike Weisz, I imagine, would be a great story on his own--or David Weisz now; Mike is gone.

So Stanley Rose's first shop went down the drain in that manner. But he kept on peddling books as an independent, you might say, free lance. What he would do, he'd go down to the Los Angeles News Company, which was a wholesale house, and in one day he would take out fifty books or whatever of a new book, and he would take them out and peddle them. But the next morning he had to produce the money for it, because he had no credit. And he did that for quite

a while, and then he would hear of somebody who was looking for a rare book or a set of books. And he used to buy a lot of books from us in that way when we were still downtown. So he and I became quite friendly. On occasion he would be stone broke, and I would loan him eating money. But he always paid me back. Sometimes it took a long time. But if it wasn't in money, it would be in books. Somehow he took care of me. And he sent a lot of business my way. He sent people to come to browse through the store. Sometimes he would bring people. And if I made a good sale, I would slip him a few dollars, sort of as a commission--because he was entitled to it--like a finder's fee or whatever you want to call it. So he and I became quite friendly. Not socially--I could never stand his kind of social life. He would wind up every night either at his home or somebody else's home just drinking for a lot of the time. Of course, in those days, I didn't hardly touch liquor.

Finally he got some backing and opened another little shop, and that went down the drain because nobody could work with Stanley, because he didn't know when he'd go on liquor and he didn't know what he'd promised somebody. He was a great guy to say, "Okay, I'll get it for you," or "I'll give it to you," this, that, and the other. He would get himself into trouble that way, and he never could keep up a credit rating. If he had money in his pocket, that

was spending money, regardless of what he owed or who he owed it to. But he was not dishonest in the sense that he would--in a way, some people, I imagine, would call it dishonest because he was using somebody else's money. But that wasn't the way I felt it was. It was an unfortunate habit, similar to the other guy's gambling. So he would get into hot water and lose his credit, and then I would stake him for a few things. I would have a few fine sets. He'd come in; he'd say, "Louis, I think I can sell those sets for you." And I'd say, "Well, go ahead and sell them. But bring me the money." Well, ninety-nine times out of a hundred he did bring me the money. But every once in a while he needed the money for something else. Finally he opened a store, Stanley Rose's Bookshop, on Hollywood Boulevard, right next to Musso's [Musso and Frank Restaurant], attached to Musso's. And he got some backing, and the wholesale house backed him up. They watched his credit; they furnished the books. He built up quite a business. And all the movie people traded with him. God bless his soul, if he were around, he could tell you some beautiful stories about their good habits and their bad habits and a lot of other things. But there again, he didn't know how to run a business. Whatever was in the till was spendable money. And Musso's had an excellent bar, and half the time he was at the bar. He needed money, he would just go to

the register and take it. Nobody knew whatever he took in. All of his customers became personal friends. They'd grab a book and say, "Stanley, put this on my account." And you know, a lot of times he didn't even know their names. Of course, a lot of people took advantage of that; they were never billed for it, time and time again.

He liked to tell stories about some of his famous customers. One story in particular he told me, which I got a big kick out of: Edward G. Robinson was a customer of his, used to buy art books and other kinds of books. (He used to come to our place, but he and Stanley got friendly.) So Robinson would pick up a group of books and ask for a discount. In order to embarrass Robinson, when the clerk would come to Stanley and say, "Mr. Robinson wants a discount," Stanley would yell out in a loud voice--the shop had quite a few people in it--"If Mr. Robinson can't afford to pay the full price for these, you tell him that I will give them to him." [laughter] He sold a tremendous number of fine books.

He was a discoverer of authors. He was not a literary person, but he could get a feel of a book. [William] Saroyan was one of his friends, Budd Schulberg, and all the younger writers of the period. He brought Thomas Wolfe in to meet me one time. And they all used to pass here. Stanley Rose's was one of the places they had to stop at. And towards the

end, I had already--part of the story overlaps Eighth Street and Pickwick, because this goes on into the time after Pickwick had opened. The poor guy finally had to go under. And he owed me about $300 in books. By that time we were at Pickwick, more or less his neighbors. And he would come and take books that he needed from us, and we would keep a running account. And he owed us about $300--in trade or whatever. So he called me one day and said, "Louis, come down here." So I came down and he told me very confidentially, he said, "Look. The [Sunset] News Company's on my neck--I can't pay them--and I know they're going to close me up within a week. You'd better pick out what I owe you." This was very thoughtful of him. He said, "You've been damned nice to me all the time. I don't want you to wind up a loser on this deal." He said, "I have no money." Which happened exactly as he said. We picked out a lot of regular trade stuff--dictionaries, you know, the staple things that would always sell--and got our account settled that way. But he always settled his account with me.

But then, after he closed that, very hard times set in on him. He was an agent for a while and had a couple of strokes of luck, but then--you know, one stroke of luck will keep you alive for six months, but the strokes of luck diminished. He got to drinking more and more, and finally

he got to the point where his friends didn't want to have anything to do with him. And in the meantine he had married, had a son, and he couldn't support them. His wife had to go to work and support them. His wife had to go to work and support the child. And he didn't know how to treat his son.

TAPE NUMBER: IV, SIDE TWO

MAY 20, 1974, and
JUNE 11, 1974

EPSTEIN: Continuing on with Stanley Rose: his wife left him. He had a nice little boy by that time. (The boy must be close to twenty years old by this time.) And he just kept going from bad to worse, bad to worse. And he would drop in from time to time: "Loan me a fin; loan me ten bucks"; and I never told him no. In the first place, I would be embarrassed to tell him no, and I knew that he needed it, although I was positive that most of it went for liquor rather than food. Finally he moved into a little hotel on McCadden, which was right in back of the Pickwick, across the street from [Don] the Beachcomber [Restaurant]. At that time it was a hotel; it hasn't been torn down too many years now. And Stanley moved into there, sort of a fleabag outfit. He would be in the shop every day, and every other day was a request for money. All his friends dropped him. One day he came in and went towards the back of the store, and he asked me for five dollars. And I must have been in a bad mood or had a bad streak of business or something, and I turned him down. And he walked out. And when I saw that man walking out, I could have bitten my tongue off. I felt so bad. Where are all his friends? Well, as it happened, a few days later I bumped

into him on the street and I apologized to him. I said, "Stanley, I feel awfully bad turning you down the other day. I'm sorry I did it." And he said, "Louis, you don't have to be sorry. You're the only guy that's been helping me, and I'm the one that should be sorry and embarrassed." I said, "Stanley, why don't you stop drinking?" He said, "Louis, the bottle is the only friend I have left. All my other friends dropped me. That's all I've got left." Well, of course, with an attitude like that, you know that eventually the whiskey's going to kill him or he's going to kill himself. I'm not intimating that he killed himself; he did not.

Oh, yes, one other incident: Some friends of his came in and said, "Why don't you give Stanley a job?" I said, "Look. How would Stanley feel trying to work here--the way we operate and the way he operates?" "Try it." "Okay, I'll try it. With Stanley I'll do almost anything." I really had a great emotion for the guy. He was almost like a member of the family who was drifting off. So he came to work, and he was just no workman at all. By that time he was pretty gone on liquor, and his hands were unsteady. And he tried it for about five days, and then he came to me and said, "Louis, thanks very much, but I just can't do it." And he was embarrassed. People would come in and see him climbing up the ladder, and they would talk to him.

And you could tell he was embarrassed--and really sick. He was a sick person by that time. So when this thing came up, the incident I told you about, he explained to me that the bottle is the only friend he has left.

GARDNER: What happened to all the young writers who he helped out all that time, gave books to?

EPSTEIN: They all dropped him. You know, people--look, they undoubtedly helped him some, but probably he was constantly coming to them for handouts. So look, people aren't that soft. He got to look very seedy. He had no clothes; occasionally somebody would give him some clothes. He had family here, but they were in no position to help him. And I guess in some ways they were embarrassed of him.

But a few weeks after that, or maybe a couple months, a very peculiar, almost psychic incident happened to me. At that time, I rarely dreamt. And if I did dream, I rarely remembered what the dream was about. But this guy must have been on my conscience or my mind. And I had a dream, and this was it. It's a very curious thing.

(And I told that dream the next day to Stackhouse and two others who were at lunch with me the following day, and Stackhouse could verify that I told him about this dream. The others are both dead now. One of the chaps, Herman Mann, used to work for me.)

I found myself sitting with a couple of others at one

end of the mortuary on a bench, semidark, very cheap. And there was a pine coffin on a trestle over at the further end. Stanley was in the coffin. He had died and was in the coffin, and there we were at the mortuary. There were maybe two, three, four other people. They were all non-Jews, and I was the only Jew. I recollect that I was the only Jew amongst them. Why that should occur to me, I don't know. except perhaps for what I have to say that follows. And we sit there and we sit there. And nothing happens--no preacher, no services; we're just sitting there. Finally I became impatient, and I walked over to the coffin, and I recited a Kaddish in Hebrew. Of course, you don't recite the Kaddish until after one is buried in the ground. But I didn't know what else to do, and I wanted to leave. So I did that. Still no one shows up, and I go back, and one of these chaps says to me, "Why did you say a Hebrew prayer for him? He's not a Jew." And I said, "I know he's not a Jew, but it's the only prayer for the dead that I know." And with that it fades out.

And within a month, Stanley was dead. And you should have seen all the friends at his funeral. Everybody was at the funeral. People who might have kept him alive for years at no--well, it's hard to say that; maybe I shouldn't say that. But at any rate, people who he couldn't reach anymore. Wealthy people die of liquor, too, so I can't say

that they would have saved him or helped him. It's a story--oh, there are many other stories; one can sit for hours and talk about Stanley. There are people around town who know more stories about him than anything.

But it was a dream that affected me very, very much. And I remember telling it the next day to Stackhouse, and I was really frightened by it because I knew it was ominous. And within just weeks, the thing actually happened.

GARDNER: He was Jewish, though, wasn't he?

EPSTEIN: No, he was not. He was a Texan. He had family, as I say, and they all showed up. One of his brothers came in one day and thanked me for helping out at the end and so forth, for being nice to him. But there was no money there--at least, there wasn't at the time. I've never seen or talked to any of his family since.

GARDNER: I noticed one thing in going through your papers: that you sent a letter to Publisher's Weekly?

EPSTEIN: Yes. Regarding his death.

GARDNER: With an obituary. Had they made no notice of it at all? Or did you just take it upon yourself?

EPSTEIN: They ran a little squib. I thought I clipped it at the time. Then I wrote a little obituary which appeared in the Daily News--what was then the News. I think it may have been mentioned in one of the columns. Oh, yes, I did write an obituary for the News. One author, Lillian Ross,

who had been an actress, too, and was a friend of Stanley's, wrote me a very nice note; and on reading that, she sent a check to his widow for a hundred dollars or so, for his son.

JUNE 11, 1974

GARDNER: We'll pick up the narrative where we left off, then, around 1931, is it, '32? [tape recorder turned off]

EPSTEIN: You asked me about the Argonaut, and I mentioned that there's a story behind the actual opening of the Argonaut. It winds up in a tragic thing, pertaining to one person who was connected with it. When I opened my first shop in Los Angeles on Sixth Street--which was, as I said before, a tiny shop--the old-book business being what it is with young people [who] like to gather, there was one chap who came in one day, looked around, introduced himself. A very serious young man. We got to talking, and he said he was living at the YMCA, just came down from San Francisco. He had driven a laundry truck up there and whatever to make a living. This must have been in late '26 or early '27. And we became acquainted, and occasionally when I'd have to go out for a few minutes to go to the bank, I would leave him in charge of whatever there was, and he would take good care of things. He proved to be quite trustworthy. So we became quite good friends.

GARDNER: What was his name?

EPSTEIN: His name was Sam Reiser. I used to call him Sammy. But he had a very serious and dour personality. He had a complex about things, that things were never going to be right. And he was really suffering from a mental illness--which at the time, being as young as I was and inexperienced, I didn't quite recognize at first, but which later became quite apparent. One day he brought to the shop a very small [satchel], almost like a lady's handbag. (They used to have these little satchels.) And he said, "Keep these for me. If I don't come back in a week or two, why, whatever is the contents. . . ." He indicated it was nothing of any worth and might not be worth sending wherever he was.

Well, it turned out that this Sam Reiser went to San Diego and attempted to commit suicide. He swallowed some caustic material. But fortunately, he was found in time, and his stomach was pumped, and whatever was necessary to be done was done, and he recovered. He told me later that the women of the Jewish community in San Diego were very nice to him. I specifically mention that because I think it's a good historic point to be known--that there was a Jewish community that was involved in helping Jewish patients, probably helped other patients. And then after he was released from the hospital, they took care of him, seeing that he was fed and had a place to stay. But this I

didn't know until a number of weeks later, when out of the blue I got a note from him from San Diego that said he'd probably be back in a week or two. He didn't tell me what had transpired. The actualities, he didn't tell me until maybe several years later. And I'm repeating it as if he had told me then, which he didn't.

So he did come back. And he showed a very deep interest in the book business. So I let him play around more. I didn't give him an actual job; I couldn't afford to give him a job. And then he decided he wanted to go back to San Francisco, and he left. He left the city. But he kept up a correspondence with me, and he got to know my family because at the time I was still living with my family in Boyle Heights. He got to know my brothers and sisters. Actually, when he came back from San Diego, as I recollect now, he lived at our house for a period of time because he was really not fully recovered from what had happened to him. [He was] thin as a rail and in a run-down condition, he had nowhere else to go; so I took him up to our house and we shared a room. And my sisters fed him, my mother fed him, as they would anyone of their own family who was sick. This is one thing about the Jewish mother: You've got to fatten him up before you can send him back to the world. Which they did, and he later mentioned to me [these] were probably some of the happiest days of his life, because

apparently his family background--whether because of him or neglect of the others, or because of his own nature not to cooperate--there was no communication there; although later I found they were very willing to help him but that he was just bent on a certain thing. Well, then he left and went to San Francisco, and then we got a note from him from New York. Then there came a letter from somewhere in Ohio, where his brothers, who were fairly well-to-do shirt manufacturers in New York, had bought a small department store in some town in Ohio; and they sent Sam there to work and learn the business and run it and perhaps someday later it would become his own--which he tried. But later I found he just couldn't stand the pressures of running the business. He didn't have the philosophy which makes a successful businessman. His own psychology interfered with that. Not that he was especially wrong, but the type of personality wasn't the type of philosophy that succeeds in business. Then we stopped hearing from him.

Now, by this time, you know, I was on Sixth Street. During the intervening period about which I'm talking, there is a lapse of considerable time. By that time I was already on Eighth Street, and I'd already married. I'm leading to the next episode of the story. I was already married, and as a matter of fact, I think Aaron was just born--which

brings it up to 1930-some-odd.

One day I went to Pasadena to see a library of books. And I was always in the habit that when I left a certain area, I would call back in to the shop to find out, well, maybe there was another call in that area which I would make before I came in--instead of coming in and going right back again. So I phoned in--I had an assistant there by the name of Shelton. And by that time my brother Ben had begun appearing on the scene on Eighth Street. He'd gotten out of his problems, and he was spending a great deal of his spare time at Eighth Street because he was still unable to work. He was beginning to learn the business a little bit. So when I phoned in that afternoon, Ben got on the line and said, "There's a friend of yours here." I said, "Who might that be?" "Well," he said, "you'll never guess." I said, "Well, okay, I'll never guess, so you might as well tell me." He said, "Sam Reiser is here." "Oh, my goodness! How is he?" "Well," he said, "he just got off the rails, and he looks like it. What are you going to do with him" I said, "Well, send him out, get him some clothes, and give him a few bucks to go get cleaned up, and I'll take him home to dinner, for one thing. And then we'll find a spot for him to sleep, and then we'll see what we can do with him." So that's exactly what we did. If you ever saw a man who'd just come off the rails

from across country, about as grimy as anybody could possibly be. . . . His clothes were all in tatters. He looked like the real bum, a hobo. I imagine an experienced hobo probably would know how to take better care of himself than he did. At any rate, we took care of him for a few days. We didn't have room for him at the house, but we fed him at my house. By that time, of course, we were living away from my parents. Then we had to put him up--I think we put him up again at the YMCA--and he began hanging around Louis Epstein's Bookshop on Eighth Street. And the problem was, well, we had to feed him, we had to clothe him. I was under no obligation, but he was a friend, and you had to do that in those days. The Depression was at its depth. So: "Sam, what are we going to do with you?" "Well," he said, "I don't know." I said, "I don't need you in the store; I don't need the help; there isn't enough business here." We decided on this; I made this suggestion: "I have a lot of books. And if I get rid of 5-, 8- or 10,000 I'll still have a lot of books. So go out and find yourself a store. We'll put in the books, and you'll eke out an existence. And if you're fortunate, we'll make a buck or two out of it." "Well, that sounds like a good idea." And you know, many bookstores are started on that premise.

GARDNER: Is that so?

ESPTEIN: There was nothing else one could do, so they did

that. So we did that. But he found a store in Long Beach. Okay, that's the store he found. I went down there, looked it over, saw it. I liked the store, but not Long Beach; but that was what he chose, and he thought he could make a go of it. Long Beach was, again, where I originally started; this is about six or seven years later.

GARDNER: Where in Long Beach was it?

EPSTEIN: It was the same block where I originally was, between Sixth and Seventh on Long Beach. By that time, they'd rebuilt a few of the old buildings there, and it was a nice store--nicer than mine was. It wasn't still anything like the shopping area it later became. They're now deteriorating again. (I'm speaking of 1974. That portion of Long Beach is deteriorating again.) So he opened a store there, later found himself a wife--much older than he, but she took excellent care of him--and they opened the business. They ran it, and they paid their bills, and they paid their expenses. But there wasn't any profit for me in it. It was no great big worry to me. At least it provided him with a living, because apparently I had undertaken to support him. You do something for someone for so long, it becomes a right. That's a legal thing, you know.

GARDNER: Is that so? I didn't know that.

EPSTEIN: If you do something for someone for a great many years, it becomes practically a legal right. If you let

the public trespass on your property for a number of years without doing anything about it, it becomes their legal right afterward to do that; it becomes a public path. That's from my studies of law. [laughter]

So they ran that for a while, and they became unhappy with Long Beach. And I wasn't too happy, because whenever I wanted to go see the shop, I would have to run down to Long Beach. I forget what they called the shop, as a matter of fact, whether it was Long Beach Bookshop or whatever. Or was it Louis Epstein's Bookshop of Long Beach? No, it wasn't that. At any rate, whatever they called it, we decided to move it to Los Angeles. So I looked around, and I found a location immediately next door to where I'd been originally on Sixth Street, 623 West Sixth. It was a store twice the size of the one I had, a little more than twice the size, because it was deeper. My original store was forty feet, and this was about fifty-five, sixty feet, and it had more than double the frontage. They had about twenty-five feet frontage where I had only ten. So it was quite a larger store by comparison. And on January 1, 1933, we moved the merchandise from Long Beach to there, and we called that the Argonaut Bookshop. Sam was involved, and by that time my brother's health was a good deal better, so he worked with Sam. Sam's wife, who had worked originally and started for him as an assistant in Long Beach, she worked

for a while, then she stopped working in the store as an employee. This went on for a number of years. It was a nice store, but the Depression was still on. It provided me with a few hundred dollars a year separate income from what I earned on Eighth Street, and there was an interchange of merchandise, which was helpful at times. This went on for quite a number of years.

And then one day I came there, and I found Sam in quite a dither. He was worried about something. He accused me of having my brother Ben in the shop, [that] I put him there to spy upon him, which was totally ridiculous, and I told him so. I said, "If I didn't trust you with everything in Long Beach, if I trusted you that far and provided for you, why would I want to spy on you? I have no reason to spy on you. I never found anything wrong here. I've no suspicion of anybody taking anything or stealing anything, or any wrongdoing at all. Why do you imagine that?" Well, it went strongly with imagination, and I said, "If you are using that excuse, if you want to leave me, you're under no obligation to stay whatever." I said, "I helped you when I thought you needed help, and I'm not in the habit of having a person pay for help or favors that I do him. You're perfectly free to leave at any time you want if you're unhappy."

Well, he was a little embarrassed over that, and he

stayed a few weeks later. But he was quite unhappy, and Ben told me he had made some remarks to him about it; so he eventually left and said he was going to open a store for himself. I said, "Fine. Why the hell didn't you tell me instead of beating around the bush about it? Everybody else opens bookstores. You're free to open a bookstore. You don't have to worry about me. You're not going to drive me out of business. If you do, then I'm a dope. If you're the better man, fine. I mean, that's the way the competition is."

So it was amicable, but not as amicable as it had been in the past. There was sort of a strain put on it by his suspicions of me. And I was quite hurt over the incident, incidentally, because I'd tried my best to provide for him; and frankly, the fact that he wanted to start a bookstore was always a great idea, I thought. Under ordinary circumstances, I might have helped him to get some stock to start with. He made the circumstances such that he couldn't. Well, this is the story of Sam Reiser, and then the story of the Argonaut.

So he started a bookstore on Cahuenga Boulevard in Hollywood. He was a good bookman, very smart and very shrewd. They weren't in the habit of spending a lot of money. He and his wife lived very quietly and plainly. Whatever was coming in, they put back into good books and

so forth. For the times, I would say that he prospered. (Now, this continues the story of Sam--I'll come back to the Argonaut--that is incidental to the story of the Argonaut. It sounds a little complicated, I know.) But Sam ran that bookstore for a number of years and then sold out to Larry Edmunds [1939]. Now, Larry Edmunds had been working for Stanley Rose. (This takes over quite a few years.) And he became unhappy working for Stanley Rose. I don't know who provided the money for it, because I'm sure that Larry didn't have that much money--maybe a girlfriend of his; he had a series of varying girlfriends.

And Sam went out of the picture for a few years, about two years, and then he started a store on Hollywood Boulevard near Western called Sam Reiser's Bookstore. He ran that for a while. I stopped to visit him a few times. We maintained a little bit of a strained friendship, you might say, whereas they used to be at our house every Sunday or other; we'd feed them and so forth. Well, ours was always an open house when we lived on Curson or wherever we lived. But it became strained. I stopped to visit him occasionally.

Finally, after about two or three years on Hollywood Boulevard, I received a phone call from his wife, Marie, that Sam had died. The way she said it, I knew that he had taken his own life. Then the story folds back, talking

to her later. She later got a job with the county and is now retired and living up here off of Beachwood somewhere. Later, in talking to Marie, she told me when he first left Los Angeles after his San Diego trip--when he stayed with me for a while, then he went back to New York--while in New York he had made an attempt at suicide, and then they thought if they would get him away from his family connections or whatever, a new kind of a start, new atmosphere, that might have helped him. But that didn't work for long, and he again made an attempt to commit suicide.

He had tried everything. He had gone to psychiatrists, but after a few weeks, they would drop him because he would always argue with them; and in some cases, I think he knew more about the subject than they did because he read up about everything on the subject he could lay his hands on. He was a very bright person. But he had that complex, a suicidal complex. And he finally succeeded.

One other thing that Marie told me in later years, after he'd gone: I said to her one day--apparently in my own mind it still rankled me why he ever accused me of spying and finding some anger against me when (not to appear self-righteous) I actually tried to help the boy stay on his feet and helped him to earn a living. "Well," she said, "you know, Louis, Sam was always tremendously jealous of you. He was jealous of your success. When you bought the

Hollywood building and brought him over to see it, he came back. . . ." (At that time he still owned that shop on--that was in 1938. Time had passed by.) She asked me, "You remember the day when you stopped by on Cahuenga Boulevard, and you took Sammy with you and showed him the building that you bought on Hollywood Boulevard? When he came back, it just rankled him. He was so jealous that he was fit to be tied." That was a streak in him which did not conform to his philosophy. She said, "He was extremely jealous, and that was the cause of all the tension between you." She told me, "I appreciate a great deal what you did for us. And although you don't want exceptional thanks for it, I do appreciate it. But although he did appreciate it, he still was very jealous of it."

That's the story of Sam Reiser. As I said, he made several attempts at suicide, but he had that complex. And she said every day of their marriage she expected anything to happen. And she said, "Many things did happen--of which you know nothing about and which I'm not going to tell you about--which led up to the situation." The reason I bring that in is that I think it's a very human story--the fact of our relationship and my not knowing enough of it.

Then, to come back to the Argonaut: well, that went on for years, as you know. We didn't close it up till maybe

twelve years ago. My brother ran it. My brother Ben, as I told you, was not a well man, and he had to run it with help. Some of the help was not always reliable. But I was determined never to interfere with what he was doing, except in a very general way, or when he would specifically ask me about something, or when I heard that there was something specifically wrong that needed immediate help. So every time he became ill, which was, I'd say, almost at least once a year, the help would have to run the store; and he said some of the help took great advantage of it. My philosophy about it was that if he was able to maintain himself and the store without me adding too much to it each year, it was a good investment, because it gave him an opportunity to express his own self in it--that he was running something, he had responsibilities, manly responsibilities. And on the whole he took good care of it. He was lax about a great many things. He was not the striver that I was, for whatever reason. It may be because he was sick, or maybe his philosophy was different. Some people, when they get into something, they push; and other people, they get into something and they wait for somebody to push them.

This went on. He made a lot of friends, and the shop had a good reputation. He developed a sense for good books. But he was not the merchant that he should have been. His

displays weren't as good as they should be; his windows weren't as good as they should be. Well, he wasn't cut out for it, and he wasn't anxious to be a big businessman; so he let things run. But considering everything, I think he was fortunate in having that, and I was fortunate in having that to give him, to maintain his interest, because Ben was not employable in those days, and still isn't. And surprisingly, you know, he's five and a half years older than I, and he's presently still getting around. As a matter of fact, the other day we went somewhere to look at a bunch of books--someone called me and they wanted me to look at them--and we bought quite a few of them. And he helped me pick them out. So Ben and I maintain a good relationship, probably better now than it might have been years ago.

GARDNER: Was there a specific kind of philosophy about the store, or was it a general shop also? Did the Argonaut have any specific collecting area?

EPSTEIN: No. They pursued the same policy as I did. As long as I was in the book business, I would buy the best books I could on any subject--not necessarily the rarest, but mine, as I mentioned before, was not a rare-book business. We did run across a great many rarities in our time. But we didn't find any Gutenbergs or first editions of the Constitution.

GARDNER: Manuscripts of The Canterbury Tales. [laughter]

EPSTEIN: No. But Ben developed a good sense for good books. As a matter of fact, he was, I would say, too selective. Sometimes he would pass by lesser things which were much more salable than the better things that he bought, which were less salable. The term "better" you can use in two ways, whether you're looking at it as a better seller or a better basic book--which might not be as quick a seller as something less worthy literary-wise, which would sell for more money, maybe, but would stay on the shelf for two, three, five years. Whereas you bought something of a lesser quality, there are more people who appreciate the specious than there are who appreciate the finer literature.

But at any rate, whatever it was, that's the way it turned out. Later it became more difficult for him to run the shop, as he became older. And let's face it: he was in his sixties, and with all his ill health he was never going to be any stronger. So he ran a sale, then moved a lot of his stock upstairs to the Pickwick department. But unfortunately, there it became a physical thing for him. He had to climb two sets of stairs to get to his place of work, and every time he needed something he had to climb down again. It was just too much for him. So he decided to give up the old-book business altogether at the Pickwick

because we were becoming involved with remainders, and remainders were taking up more and more space and the dollars were quicker. So we gave up the old-book department. We donated the balance of our stock. When the last day came, we donated all the books to UCLA. Bob Vosper was tickled pink to get it; he had a certain use for that kind of a collection at that time, I think, as a teaching project or whatever.

GARDNER: I think they were restocking the undergraduate library.

EPSTEIN: Or something like that, yes. But at any rate, they were very happy to get it, and it made me feel good that they were happy to get it. Well, that is the story of two people, Sam Reiser and Ben Epstein. I don't know how Ben'll feel about it. I don't think any of the Reiser family ever--I never met any of them. One time I got a letter from one of his sisters thanking me for taking care of him after he had gone through one of his--well, after the San Diego incident. Apparently he had written home and told them that I had helped him.

GARDNER: Was Ben ever married?

EPSTEIN: Oh, yes, Ben is married and has a wife [Lillian]. As a matter of fact, she just had a fall and is in the hospital. There's an interesting story about Ben, which you could go way into another side track, [laughter] which

is interesting in itself. When I tell you about Ben, you'll maybe want to follow it up someday with somebody else. He met his wife at what is now called City of Hope. It used to be called the Los Angeles Jewish Consumptive Association, out at Duarte. They were both patients there at the time. They met, and they became friends. They used to play bridge together and so forth. He used to take her out, go out with her, when they could go out; and they became quite well acquainted. And then later Ben came out of there. That was during the interim when he started getting his health back and he used to spend a lot of time at the Eighth Street store. I learned this later: friends used to come to him, "Why don't you two get married? What have you got to lose?" He said, "Well, I'm sick, she's sick." That was an excuse for not getting married. "Okay, so you're both sick. So what have you got to lose? You know each other, and you know what's wrong with each other." Finally they decided and did get married.

So Ben was getting a small amount of pay from me; he wasn't working full time. So he came to me one day and said, "I'll have to have a raise." I said, "Oh, yeah, what for?" He said, "I'm getting married." "You're marrying Lillian?" He says, "Yes." "Well," I said, "God bless you," and I gave him a raise. You can go back to a

different kind of life when you talk about these people who have to spend tremendous amounts of time in sanatoria, how they adjust to that kind of life and how they find sometimes a little happiness in all their misery. And they're not always miserable.

GARDNER: Well, it seems as though he's had a very full life.

EPSTEIN: Not a very full life, but they develop certain philosophies and they develop certain interests which are totally different. TBs as a rule have very active minds. Whether the disease irritates a mind into more action or whether--I'm sure that TB doesn't necessarily pick on brighter people. But I've read about that and I've heard talk about that: that their minds are very active and their desires to do things are quite high. I noticed it with my sister--who passed away when she was about twenty-nine--that her mind was keen, and she always wanted to do things, but far more than she was capable of doing. And that's one of the problems with TBs: the minute they start feeling a little bit better, they want to do things.

TAPE NUMBER: V, SIDE ONE

JUNE 11, 1974

GARDNER: The question that I posed that you said I should come back to is the fact that in a sense you were creating your own competition, both with Sam Reiser and with your brother, by setting up shops that were covering the same field rather than something that would specialize in something else.

EPSTEIN: Well, it really wasn't. Of course, every store that opens, theoretically--and that "theoretically" is very important because in actuality it's not always true--theoretically, every shop that opens in the same kind of business is a competition to other things. But if you'll allow me to talk before I answer your questions directly (and if I forget to answer it, bring me back to it; you know, I like to wander a little bit), what you say about competition is true probably in every other line, with the exception of, I would say, aesthetical kinds of merchandise. How many art galleries can the city support? Or how many bookstores can the city support? How many museums can the city support? And what other fields are there like it? Dance groups--of course, where you have to charge admission to them, that's one thing. Maybe those aren't competition to each other. But here's what I found out about books, and this I have proven time and again. I didn't start out

to prove it. Where there were more bookstores, each store did better. I vow that had I started on some off-street instead of right downtown on Sixth Street in Los Angeles, I would never have prospered as well as I did, because I moved into the marketplace where books are bought and sold. Had I been somewhere else where there was no marketplace, no one would search me out, and I would not have learned my business at all--which is exemplified by what happened to me before I moved to Sixth Street, in Long Beach. There was no one to learn from. So a beginner is really stymied; he has no teacher. And if he does succeed, it will take him far more years and far more time and maybe send him off in the wrong direction altogether. But because of the competition where I started on Sixth Street, I learned so much more rapidly.

Of course, I was very eager to learn. I began reading catalogs, and I began reading Publisher's Weekly. In those days there was no Antiquarian Bookman; it was part of the Publisher's Weekly. It became the weekly bible almost. As a matter of fact, two years ago Publisher's Weekly had their 100th anniversary. They were getting pages of advertising, and there was nothing from any bookseller. And it bothered me. So I sat down and wrote a long three-page or two-page letter to them thanking them for what the Publisher's Weekly was to me. And I call it my weekly portion. I've got the letter in my files, and I got a beautiful thank-you note

from them for it. They were thrilled to get it, and they published it, the whole page of it. That was my learning process. But I was eager to learn. I'm no brighter than the next guy. Maybe my IQ is better than 92, but it isn't 148, I don't think.

To get back to my philosophy about competition, I proved it time and time again: that if you go in and run a good shop, I don't care what the competition is. And I'm talking about the book business. I'm not talking about the shirt business or the hardware business. There's a limited amount of business in those kind of things, I think. Of course, if other people bought hardware like I do, that would be a business that my philosophy would apply to. Showing more books to more people. I go in a hardware store and "Gee, this is a good tool, someday I'll need it." And I'll buy it. I'll never use it. And I know at the time I'll never use it, because I'm not a handy person in that respect. But I love to see people work with tools, and I think, "Well, if I had a tool, I might work." It never gets around to that. [laughter]

But to get back to what I'm talking about, again, to prove my theory: we moved to Hollywood Boulevard. At that time there was Satyr; the Hollywood Bookstore was across the street; Miller's was also across the street. I mentioned to you before all the bookstores that were in Hollywood. Hollywood is a great book community. And we moved into there,

moved our store there in 1938, closed up Eighth Street in 1940, got all our marbles together. We left the Argonaut to run as it is because I consider the Argonaut a separate entity altogether. It was there for a certain reason, for a certain purpose, and I excluded it from our plans for Hollywood. We offered people a lot of books, and we sold a lot of books. Our competitors: Hollywood went out; Stanley Rose went out; two or three others went out. Now they are replaced by a whole--Hollywood Boulevard is full of other kinds of bookshops. Not new-book shops. They're all old-book shops. A lot of the customers are brought to them by Pickwick, of course.

GARDNER: And Westwood is now where the new-book shops are.

EPSTEIN: Yes. Westwood is where the new-book shops are--Westwood and Beverly Hills.

GARDNER: Yes.

EPSTEIN: But I never felt that if I helped a person, a competitor of mine, that I was hurting myself. And it never turned out that way. The fact that I did help him in some cases turned out to be a great advantage to me, because there was that established relationship of helping each other. In this Los Angeles community--I want this for the record--the booksellers are more friendly to each other than in any other community in the United States that I know of. Now, lately, the last few years, a book community in the country has gotten together. They have regional groups, and

they've become more friendly. But it wasn't until very recent times that they had these local chapters of booksellers in almost every larger area. At one time booksellers in San Francisco--Paul Elder wouldn't talk to John Newbegin. There were always feuds. And the department store people locally wouldn't talk to each other because they were always afraid of stealing each other's customers. There used to be a rule by the publishers that a book was to be published on a certain day--it was called publication date. And even to this day, publishers have publication date, but nobody pays any attention to the date as far as actually putting the book on sale. They have to have, for legal reasons, a date on which the book officially goes on sale. Somebody breaks it, well, apparently they're closing their eyes to that. But that created so much controversy amongst the different booksellers. Pearl Goldwater at Bullock's would get a shipment of books. She couldn't bother to store them till publication date; she would put them out and sell them. May Company hadn't gotten their shipment yet, so they didn't have them. Well, they accused Bullock's of breaking publication date and selling the books before the time. Well, rarely did it make a difference of five copies in sales to one store or another. But they were always arguing about it. Each one was watching each other's windows. And if a customer should come in and say, "I just bought this new book at Bullock's and come into Parker's

with it, then Parker would send telegrams to the publishers and call the president of Bullock's and complain about breaking the law. But when it happened to him--he would put it out--then he wasn't breaking the law. Well, there were a few who tried to be honest about it. But that created many controversies.

Now, when we went into the new-book business, I wasn't about to put all the new books that came in before publication date and hold them. Number one, I had to have the money because the bills were payable. They'd ship you the books ahead of time. The publishers used the booksellers, and the booksellers were too damned stupid to realize it for many, many years. Of course, they weren't all that. They complained about that. But they weren't smart enough to really get together and do something about it. So the publisher had a habit--if a book was published in June, he'd ship it at the end of April and bill you for it at the end of April. And you're supposed to keep it till June: pay your bills a month ahead of time, keep it till June, and then put it on sale on June 12 or June 15, whatever. It was ridiculous, on the face of it. And that was the reason booksellers couldn't--in those days, very few of them made any money. It was in bad times, besides. And they were supporting the publisher's warehouse. The publisher would send the book from the printers and the bookbinders, the book manufacturer's warehouse. As they were

finished, they would ship them right out, which saved the publisher the cost of warehousing them. My theory was that if they wanted me to hold the book till publication, not to put it on before the publication date, they hold the book and ship it ten days before publication date. Otherwise I can't afford it.

Well, we followed that policy, and finally the arguments got so bad that we had a meeting downtown of the new-book people. And we thrashed the whole subject out, and we decided that nobody's going to pay any attention to publication date. One day you'll win one, one day I'll win one. But in the end it won't make one hell of a bit of difference. It'll save us all money, and we will then have money to pay the publisher for the book--because otherwise, we're tying up cash money. The publishers were very eager for their money. They were having hard times, too. And from that nucleus, once we settled that question (we were the first to do that out here), and the fact that we sat down and talked to each other at a luncheon (and I was very instrumental in pushing that through), from that we started the Southern California Booksellers Association. I feel quite pleased that I was part of it.

That's a theory, bringing it back to competition: if you do something right about the book business, generally speaking, it's going to help everybody in the book business,

not only you particularly. If you get the publisher to change his policy for the better to you, he's changing his policy for everyone, and that betters the lot of every bookseller. And I'm very happy to say that I always fought with the publishers, but I gained their respect. No publisher would ever refuse to send me anything I wanted at any time. My credit is good; they respected my methods of bookselling; I sold a lot of their books. What could they ask more? And my competitors respected me. They elected me as president and offered me the presidency another time. I never considered them as competitors. If Stanley Rose needed books: "Stanley, go ahead and take them. You'll pay me, or you'll give me something else in trade." If Satyr needed books. . . . And because of that, I could go to them and get books. And the same way with Hollywood, right across the street. And Miller's, which is now totally a stationery store, was a bookstore at that time when I started. They [later] gave up books. Now, whether they gave it up because of my competition or not, I don't know. Maybe they did. Maybe we did a better job. Or maybe because we were exclusively a bookstore and carried a much greater variety, people would come to us and not to a half-stationery and half-book store. And Hollywood Bookstore went out because it wasn't properly run. Stanley Rose went out because it was underfinanced

and wasn't properly run. The Satyr went out of the new-book business because--well, for other reasons, I think. For lack of leadership. When Mac Gordon died, his wife didn't allow Eddie Gilbert (who was then manager for her and who now has Eddie Gilbert's Bookstore, formerly the Satyr, on Hollywood Boulevard just east of Vine), didn't allow him to use the assets of the store properly. See, she was a sister of the Powners, who I mentioned much earlier.

So getting back to competition: it isn't competition. It's getting books out before people. And we proved that again, as I mentioned in the incident about the opening of a store in San Bernardino which illustrates the difference between dress shops and shoe shops and hardware stores and books. There's no limit to the number of books a person can read, theoretically--except the amount of time he puts in--or even the desire for owning books. Many people buy books [who] like to have the book around. And like I mentioned of myself, buying tools, they like to have books around. They have an intention of someday reading them. And God help the bookseller if every person stopped buying books until they finished all the books they had. [laughter]

GARDNER: I'll agree with that.

EPSTEIN: So the theory holds good about books: that if you put more books before more people, you're going to sell

more books. And the better books they are, the more salable. . . . Maybe I should use the phrase "more salable" books they are, the more desirable looking they are--a book has to be dressed up, as well as the store has to be dressed up, to attract the person to come in and touch. I've always maintained that policy--to touch. We had a fantastic battle with one of our councilmen, Paul Lamport. I think you may recall when he was councilman. Well, he was an overambitious guy. I know Paul; I still see him. He lives here on La Brea. He had his offices in the Medical Building across the street--you know, he owned the Medical Building, he and his partners. He's out of that now.* He always used to complain because our store wasn't dressy enough. He had a knack for design, and he was in some respects right. But we never paid attention to dressing it up. The Pickwick today, they're now replacing some of their shelves. They've replaced a good many of them. But if you look on the east wall, the shelves have been there since 1938--real, common, unpainted pine, which my brother-in-law, who has long sinced passed away, helped put up. And we had, if you'll remember--I don't know how far you remember the Pickwick--a table right in the center of the entrance in the foyer. And that bothered Paul Lamport, bothered him no end.

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* He is back in now.--L.E.

GARDNER: Why?

EPSTEIN: "It ruins Hollywood Boulevard. We're trying to make Hollywood Boulevard a beautiful street again"--and so forth. I used to tell him, "Paul, if I wanted a location on Fifth Avenue, I would go on Fifth Avenue, and I'd run a store like a Fifth Avenue store. Or in Beverly Hills on Wilshire Boulevard. But I don't want that kind of a store. I wouldn't know how to run that kind of a store. This is the kind of a store I want, and that table has stopped more people and brought me more customers than anything else I know of." Because once a person stops and starts looking at that table, he may not find something today. . . . They were bargain books--you know, forty-nine cents, sometimes ninety-five cents, sometimes three for a dollar, two for a dollar, whatever--but that was the stopping point. That was the first entrance to the Pickwick to thousands and thousands of people. That's how they first became acquainted: they were walking by and saw a table of books, and something about them urged them to stop. And once they started looking there, the next step was much easier. The doors were wide open; they could see all these books inside. And a certain percentage of them would walk in. And once they got in, there was a whole world of books for them to look at. And that's the way we established an open, inviting front. It was not elegant. Elegance was never part

of my policy of bookselling.

(I dislike elegant stores of any kind. I wouldn't walk into a boutique. If I walk by Beverly Hills and I see the most beautiful pants in men's clothing shops, I would never go in there. Never. If it was an art gallery, yes. But I don't believe in fancy clothes per se. I was never a clotheshorse. My older brother, he loves fine clothes, and he knows how to wear them. I wouldn't know how to wear them. [laughter] I would get the colors mixed.)

Anyway, to get back to merchandising of books, there's no question that if I have helped some competitors, it didn't hurt me at any time; and if it redounded to their benefit, then it helped me. I believe having healthy competitors is better than having unhealthy ones. I think it's healthier for the book business as a whole.

Even some of the things that we did helped our competitors--not because we went out of our way to help them. As I told you, my son Aaron, when he came into the business after serving his apprenticeship, learning all about it, he was eager for promotions. And he developed ideas, and a great measure of the success of the Pickwick is due to his ideas--the expansion of the Pickwick and their advertising policies. A lot of people don't give Aaron the credit for that. I do. When we started cooperative advertising--do

you know what I mean by cooperative advertising?

GARDNER: Well, describe it for the tape.

EPSTEIN: Most publishers have an advertising policy where if you run an ad on a specific book for them--and they choose which books that policy applies to--they will pay part of the cost of the ad. Well, the better results you get for them, the greater proportion of the ad they will pay for. And this came about by constant infighting between publisher and Pickwick. We have changed a lot of the publishers' policies for the nation pertaining to cooperative advertising--to the advantage of the publishers and to the advantage of the booksellers. We felt--and we told the publisher this--if we run an ad, we have our name under it, and we have a coupon under it. That ad appears in the Los Angeles Times. The Times covers all of Southern California. If a Vroman customer in Pasadena sees that ad, he's not going to call Pickwick. Any bookbuyer knows that if one store has a book, the other store has the book. There is no exclusive policy on books. The publisher wouldn't be allowed to, and I think it would be very foolish if he were allowed to and adopted such a policy, and it would be hurtful to the author. So we told them that if we run an ad, that ad will pull for Vroman's. And if a customer lives in Westwood and he's been Bob Campbell's customer for all the years, he's not going to call Louis Epstein

at the Pickwick and say, "Send me this book." He's not my customer. He'll go first to Campbell. And I'm sure Campbell will have it if it's a best-seller. "True?" I mean, they all agreed to that. "Well, why don't you give us the ad and not charge only us for what we buy." (The amount of money was based on a proportion of the books you buy.) "You should think of it as based on the number of books this ad will sell in Southern California because we run it. We provide the work; we provide the layout; we can make the contracts with the newspaper; we give you the local rate. Think of it that way: that we are performing a service for you which not only benefits the Pickwick but every store in the area."

And we proved it to them time and time again. I'll give you one example, a shining example. I'm trying to think of the house we ran the ad for. I'll think of it in a minute. Well, this house--and the salesman is Ron Smith, their local representative. And Ron agreed with me. So I said to Ron, "Look, why don't you get your publisher to try this once." (Arco. Arco Publishers. They made a tremendous amount of money during the war with an army manual for the person getting army tests, practice for the army tests or whatever it was. They'd been a very struggling, poor house, and that came along, and they had that book just at the right time, and they made a tremendous amount

of money out of it--which is all right, because they're nice people.) So I said, "Look. Here is the telephone. Call [Milton] Gladstone"--I knew him--"and we'll have a discussion here. If you don't mind," I said. "I don't want to go over your head."

(That's something else that we never did, and we gained the salesmen's respect for it. We never went over a salesman's head. If we had a problem, we took it to the salesman, and the salesman settled it for us. If we couldn't agree, we'd ask his permission to call New York, because I never wanted to jeopardize a salesman's standing. I respected them, and they learned to respect me because of that.)

Anyway, to come back to Arco. So we talked with Gladstone. I said, "Ron is here, and we have a basic idea. And Ron thinks that it'll work. I don't want to put Ron on the spot. I'll take the responsibility. If the ad doesn't work out the way we think it will, I will give you back half of the money that you paid for the ad. If you don't sell enough books in Southern California--enough extra copies of what you normally would sell--due to this ad, I will pay for half of the cost of the ad. What I'm asking you is, gamble with me. You take a 50 percent shot, and I'll take a 50 percent shot." So he said, "Well, Louis, look, you're a nice guy. You pay your bills"--and it's

extremely important that this is the reputation I established. Not being "nice" in that I'm a backslapper, which I'm not--I'll criticize the hell out of them--but we did pay our bills on time, and we were very honest with our publishers at all times. And they knew that. And that was what he was referring to. Because I quarreled with them all the time but never to the extent that we were insulting each other. I mean, if I quarreled with a publisher, we left with a handshake. It was a matter of arguing policy.

At any rate, we ran the ad; it ran on a Sunday. Ron Smith called me up Monday noon. He said, "You know, I've been having calls at my house from every bookseller in Southern California: 'Where can I get these books?'" People who had never stocked the Arco books. He said, "People are calling all the stores and asking. And the wholesaler, Raymar, has sold out completely. And he just phoned in another order." It was a smashing success. And Ron Smith was very happy over it because he had something to do with it. Gladstone was extremely happy. He'd run an ad with us every year, sometimes two or three times a year--the same new policy--and everyone was a successful run.

Now that again proves a point. If you have a useful book or useful line of books--most of the Arco books were how-to-books--you can sell them to people in large quantities

if you let them know that they exist. The fact that they're in the library, the fact that we had them in the Pickwick Bookshop, doesn't mean anything. So few people out of all the people that exist in the United States, so few people visit bookstores regularly. I would say that no more than 3 percent visit a bookstore once a year, considering the population.

GARDNER: Is that so?

EPSTEIN: Maybe I'm wrong. Maybe it's five. Suppose it is five.

GARDNER: That's still remarkably low.

EPSTEIN: Still remarkably low, for various reasons: number one, some areas don't have any bookstores; and number two, they're located, maybe, in places where people never see them, or they don't advertise, they don't publicize. Let's face it, a lot of people are not accustomed to reading until they need something to fill a want. Now, this man had books that filled certain wants: how to take a civil service examination, or how to apply for a job. Well, gee, people never knew those books existed. Follow your policy, show a lot of books to a lot of people, and you're going to sell a lot of books. And you know, publisher by publisher, where we used to have to tear ourselves apart, sometimes, trying to get an ad, they learned that we could run ads for them, we could publicize for them, and if our ad ran, if that

book was going to sell, it sold all over--not only at the Pickwick stores but at every store. It got to the point where the publisher would call us: "Would you please run an ad for us?" We turned down some books, not because we didn't want to run the ad per se because the book was bad. The book wasn't salable enough to warrant putting $1,800 in the Times, or $1,200, whatever, $900, whatever the size of the ad. And we pursued that policy honestly. If we didn't think the ad would sell enough books to pay for itself, we would try to talk them out of it. Well, a good many publishers want to satisfy a local author, so they'd say, "Well, you run it anyway. We're not worried about that. This is an exception." And that's the way we put a lot of books in front of a lot of people. Our competitors at first resented the fact that we ran the ads and got the coupons. They blamed the publishers for favoring us. But later they got so that they appreciated us running the ad, because every time we ran an ad, the sales of that book would go up at Hunter's, at Martindale's. Sometimes we'd run out and we'd buy our books from them, or vice versa. This was a great deal of Aaron's doing.

GARDNER: Well, now that's a generally accepted practice, isn't it?

EPSTEIN: Yes, it is, but it was a hell of a fight. It's still not an accepted practice in a lot of other parts of

the country. The publishers don't feel that there's the market that there is in Southern California. You know, we have in Southern California perhaps the best book market in the country, person for person. There are more books sold in the New York area, but a lot of it in the wholesale trade, from which it goes to other areas. But without question we are the second-best market--far superior to Boston, far superior to San Francisco. Number one, we're larger now, our area, than San Francisco. San Francisco used to be the book place. I mean, they thought they were the thing--like everything else about San Francisco. I love San Francisco, but their attitude towards Los Angeles is well known. They are the culture of the West, the Athens of the West. [laughter]

So when you talk about me helping other dealers, if I were doing it over again, I would do exactly the same thing. I think a trade needs a nice relationship, especially a trade like the book business. Oh, little snide things happen, of course. I never tried to steal a customer from another bookseller. If I could provide one of his customers with better service and the customer proved it for himself, great. I'm not conscience-stricken. But I would never cold call up a customer--I heard that so-and-so is a customer--and say, "Why don't you buy books from me?" I never did that. Number one, I'm not that forward in a

personal way, and number two, I think it's unethical. If a person finds our store, likes it, and decides to shop with us, great.

GARDNER: You mentioned that these things do happen, though. Are there any instances?

EPSTEIN: Yes, there have been instances where underground a person would find out that so-and-so's a good customer of the Pickwick; they would make special efforts to get his business. They would cut the price. A very, very, very prominent art man used to buy a lot of art books from us. All of a sudden. . . .

GARDNER: Don't want to mention names?

EPSTEIN: Well, he's still living. [laughter] Well, why not? I mean, maybe it wasn't his fault at all. It was [Norton] Simon. He used to buy a lot of art books from us; [Lloyd] Harkema used to wait on him. All of a sudden his secretary called up and said, "You're going to have to give us a discount." Well, we had a strict policy--no discounts. "Why?" "Well," she says, "Mr. Simon found out"--or I don't know what she said--"that so-and-so would give us a discount."

GARDNER: Who is "so-and-so"?

EPSTEIN: Mel Royer. Well, we stuck to our policy, and we lost him. Oh, occasionally, he'd give us an order. I hated to lose the account. It ran a few hundred dollars every

month, and that's a hell of a good book customer. When you consider the average book buyer, even our charge account customer, might average twenty-five dollars a year or thirty dollars a year, when you lose someone who's buying several hundred dollars a month, that's losing a good customer. But I had to do it, because once you give a discount, it becomes no secret. Everybody and his brother would want one--and rightfully. Why not? So we lost him, but thank God we prospered without him. He did, too. Whether it was the secretary's doing or not--in all justice to Mr. Simon, it came through his secretary. Now, whether he directed her to do that, I have no idea.

GARDNER: I had one other question about Argonaut that's a very short question; then we can go on to something else. How did you come up with the name? You'd been burned with Acadia, and you'd switched to your own personal name.

EPSTEIN: Well, the Acadia name was a total disaster, because I think I mentioned somewhere that Acadia was so close to the Acacia, and everybody in the Masonic order--I didn't know that at the time--it had something to do with Acacia. I still don't know what it is, but everybody started calling it Acacia.

I don't know if it was Sam's idea or Ben's idea. I think it might have been Sam's idea. It wasn't Ben's, for sure; it must have been Sam's idea. It's a journey; it's

a seeking out. It was a good name. There are several Argonaut bookstores over the country.

GARDNER: On Ben, Aaron mentioned when I talked to him that one of Ben's favorite pastimes in the late forties and so on was stumping the people on Information, Please, the old radio show. Can you tell something about that, about his intellectual pastimes and so on?

EPSTEIN: Yes. Ben has an extremely keen mind. We call him the scholar in the family. I made up a joke one time, and I used to tell it in Yiddish. If ever anybody listens to this tape and understands Yiddish, I'll say it in Yiddish first. "Drei Epstein Brieder. Einer's a shoener, einer's a kluger, and einer's a teuber." "There are three Epstein brothers. One is a handsome guy, one is a brilliant guy, and the third is a somewhat deaf guy." [laughter] And I always made that crack. I referred to Ben as the--he had a brilliant mind. Whatever the reason, he didn't discipline himself. He was not that self-disciplined. It may have been because of--there you go back to origins and backgrounds. There was, I think, nobody forceful enough to discipline him and guide him. It happened to all of us. Father was gone for five and a half years, and the mother was busy. The same thing's happening everywhere. Why we didn't come out to be a group of murderers, I don't know, because we have all the backgrounds from which they say criminals come. Our home wasn't broken, by any means.

There was a lot of love but not a great deal of attention. And, frankly, how do you direct a person, a twelve-and-a-half year-old--let's see, Ben was fourteen and a half years old, or thirteen years old, when he [Father] came to this country. Or thirteen, I think. Well, you haven't seen him for five years. You don't really know what he is. In the meantime, you yourself--I'm speaking of my father--are so busy struggling to bring in the bread, food, and clothing that you really didn't have time. I don't criticize my father at all for lack of attention. Whenever he could, he gave us attention. But the man had no time to give us attention. I think in many ways I have some of his characteristics as far as drive to produce things. My older sister said that I'm a great deal like my father in that respect. Once he got on the trail of something, if he was doing something, he'd stay till he finished it, no matter if it took till two o'clock at night. If he was started on the course, he would almost disregard anything else. I suppose you can carry that on to a fault. I did in many, many instances, I know, and I'm sure that he did. But I was supposed to have been more educated than he and more worldly than he. Of course, he probably was more worldly than I, because he went through the school of hard knocks, a much harder one than I did. You know, leaving Russia with nothing and trying to make his way from one place to

another with nothing, and getting to this country when times were bad. How he ever got to San Francisco in 1906 I still don't know, but he was there at the time of the earthquake. So that is it.

Getting back to Ben, there wasn't that direction that perhaps nowadays--like sitting down and talking to Aaron and Eugene. Eugene wanted to be an astronomer; okay, we sat down, we talked about it, he knew what he was going into. Once he made up his mind, we gave him every encouragement. He had the ability to study for it, he had the drive to work at it, and he's an astronomer. Aaron didn't want to go any further than his bachelor's. We sat and we talked about it. I told both boys, "Look. As long as you're interested in studying, real serious studying, I will support you as far as you want to go, as long as I'm able to." Fortunately, I was able to. If Aaron wanted to go for a doctorate in any field, I would certainly have supported him gladly, because I respect education per se and I respected him doing what he wants to do. I said, "I would like to have you in the business"--I said that to both--"but I don't want you to feel that you're obligated to go into the business." Eugene's mind was much more definite in what he wanted to do. Aaron wanted to go into business in some way. So he did. The business turned out pretty good.

But we didn't have that. We didn't have time to sit around the table to talk. They didn't have the understanding of those things. Unfortunately, we didn't have the friends who could guide us. So we practically grew. There must have been something basically good about us, that we didn't get into trouble or troublesome occupations--which I had an opportunity to get into before I went to college. If you remember, when I was sixteen, that was 1918, the Prohibition era. Many times I was offered a fin to deliver--I was driving the family car when I could get it, when there was no problem--a case of something somewhere. It was very tempting. Five dollars was one hell of a lot of dough. And a lot of my friends, the boys I went to school with and the boys in my neighborhood, half of them went into the rackets. I could name you names, which I won't.

GARDNER: No. [laughter] No, those you can leave out of the oral history.

EPSTEIN: They're well written up already, so I don't have to publicize them. [laughter] One of them was actually murdered because he got out of line. And that was the first step: you were an errand boy. Fortunately, I got out of that atmosphere and went away to Columbus to school. I don't know what would have happened if I had stayed. It was that touch and go. And the boys that went off to college all came out very nicely. A lot of them that didn't go to

college came out very, very badly. Some of them spent a great deal of time in the penitentiary, and some of them actually were leaders of gangs who escaped. Their names are well known. There's as much gangsterism in Cleveland--in Cleveland, unlike in New York, maybe, it was a Jewish group that held the reins. In New York and in Chicago I suppose it was an Italian group.

TAPE NUMBER: V, SIDE TWO

JUNE 11, 1974

GARDNER: Now that we've covered Argonaut and brought your brother Ben into the drama, I think next we'll get back to the list and start analyzing some more bookstores.

EPSTEIN: We covered to a degree--you'll never cover completely Stanley Rose, but we covered it to a degree. A lot of these I mention only for the purpose of going on record that they existed. It's by no means all-inclusive, but at least they were the principal ones in existence at that time.

There was a small shop on West Sixth Street called Woodruff Bookstore. It didn't last long under Woodruff. It later was bought out by a downeaster from Maine by the name of Jenkins. He used to love to tell stories about lobster fishing, and how they used to have plates of cold lobster available at all times, and that they used to call it lobscouse. Now, don't ask me where the name originated; that's what he told me. It sounded very interesting at the time, and I'm sure it was. Later it became the Abbey Bookstore. And the Abbey Bookstore had a continuous life under several owners. Mr. Holmes bought it. I think he bought it from Jenkins, or he may have bought it from Woodruff. Then he had a nephew by the name of Bunster Creeley; he's an ex-prizefighter. He ran it for quite a

while for Mr. Holmes, and then he bought it from Mr. Holmes. He ran it for quite a number of years.

Then he sold it to a firm that was Karl Zamboni and Phil Brown. Now, Phil Brown was the husband of Helen Brown. Helen Brown later became quite famous as an author of cookbooks. After a while Zamboni and Brown sold it out to a chap by the name of Gideon Berman. And he ran it for quite a few years and he sold it to somebody else, a chap by the name of Weiss.

Mr. Holmes's nephew was Bunster Creeley. He was a very pugnacious sort of a guy, but not a bad egg. He almost always figuratively had his fists up, like the fighter that he had been. He was very proud of the fact. One leg was shorter than the other, and that made him even more proud. He had probably reached the rank of a preliminary fighter, professional fighter. He's now living somewhere down around Costa Mesa, in that area.

Later it went the way of most bookstores, and the last chap, name of Weiss, I think, moved. Moved it, and then he went out of business, and that was the end of that, although the name, I think, is still going on. Gideon Berman is using that name now in the mail-order business.

Then there was The Bookseller at 821 1/2 South Hope Street, run by a curious chap by the name of White, I remember. No, originally it was run by Paul Kuttner. Paul Kuttner

came down from San Francisco. He worked for Dawson's for a year or so, and then he started his own shop, later on sold it to White. Now, Paul Kuttner's brother, by the name of Henry, achieved a little bit of fame as a science fiction writer. But unfortunately, before he reached his full commitment, he died. He was a very nice boy. It was sort of a curious family.

Then in 1932, Arthur H. Clark moved to 1214 South Brand in Glendale, where they still are. He is a well-known dealer in Americana--not necessarily fine in printing, but exceptionally good books. He would either print originals, manuscripts, or reprints of some rare books that had gone out of print which were essential to the Western Americana field. He has an excellent reputation. The thing's run now by his son. And they still issue catalogs. I think you saw some on my table here, Clark catalogs. They're very authoritative. They do a nationwide business. They'd been in Cleveland, I don't know how many years, at least twenty years before they moved to the Los Angeles area in 1932. I see some of their publications from time to time.

Then there was a store called the House of Whites. It was run by a Miss White who at one time worked for Dawson's, and she decided to go into business for herself. I don't know who furnished the money. I'm sure somebody else did. I forget her first name. Miss White I don't think ever had any money. They were dealing in rare books and manuscripts.

They were having a hard time at that at that time, but it didn't last very long.

In Beverly Hills, there was a store called the Penguin Bookshop, 9675 Wilshire. It was owned by Louis Samuels, who had been an agent for one of the movie people and later decided he wanted a bookshop. He had a very fancy, small shop, but it didn't last too long. Louis Samuels is now an appraiser. He works with some large appraising company.

At that time--we're still in 1932--there was a firm called Wheeler Publishing Company, run by the son of the original Mr. Wheeler. Their business was selling what we call subscription sets. Now, I don't know if you know what that term means. [tape stopped] Now, subscription sets were sets of books that never were sold through bookstores. There were several publishers at that time publishing them. There were some very expensive ones published by Scribner and Houghton-Mifflin.

They would take an author and publish his complete works. They would publish on fine paper, sometimes autographed if the author was still alive; or if he wasn't, they would use a page of manuscript in an author's hand or whatever to make the set more attractive. They would come in either cloth bindings or fancy leather bindings. (You don't see those anymore, because fancy leather bindings

are very hard to get. The art of leather binding has almost disappeared for lack of artisans. It's a trade that took time to learn. You had to serve an apprenticeship and like all things that require apprenticeship, it disappeared.) But they went under during the Depression. I know when they sold out; I bought a lot of their sets from them. Not a lot--maybe several hundred dollars' worth, which was all I could afford at the time. It was a totally different type of bookselling than what we're accustomed to. It was house to house or office to office. They would call on successful businessmen and convince them that their library should have books. It was a lucrative business for a great many years.

Just a quick look-back to Long Beach. Long Beach at that time--no, I'm getting ahead of myself. Let's skip that for the moment. This pertains to the original Long Beach of Louis Epstein. Now, if you want to hear about it now, or when I come back to it?

GARDNER: The original Long Beach?

EPSTEIN: Some facts about Long Beach which I uncovered.

GARDNER: Go ahead. Let's go through that.

EPSTEIN: All right. What stores were in existence about the time that I was there.

GARDNER: In 1924.

EPSTEIN: The main bookstore there at the time I started

there was called Hewitt's Bookstore, and they had books and stationery. It was not a great bookstore by any means--probably all that Long Beach could support--and they were not too aggressive, which may be the reason why. Later they were sold to people by the name of Brown, who had made a lot of money in Alaska, mining. But they weren't successful, either, for one reason and another, and the store later went out of business.

The chap that bought me out in 1925 was A.B. Castle. The address at the time--which I didn't have when you first talked to me--of my first Long Beach venture was 603 Pine Avenue, for the record.

Later I visited Long Beach during the interim when I was out of business, and there was a woman by the name of [Marie L.] Bass. She called it Ye Olde Book Shoppe, at 140 East Third Street. She had secondhand books. She didn't know too much. None of us in Long Beach knew anything, so I guess you can't criticize her. Incidentally, I have a book on my shelf today which--when I went back to browse through her shop in the interim after I'd learned a little thing about books in Los Angeles--I picked up from her for about thirty-five cents which is now worth several hundred dollars. And I have the book; I'll tell you the name of it. Just one second. [tape stopped] I still have it, and it's called Frontier and Indian Life by Taylor. It has the

inscription of the author, Joseph H. Taylor: "Joseph H. Taylor's compliments to his early school chum"--or something. James Patterson Gibson was the man's name. An unautographed copy brought $300 at the Streeter sale not too long ago in New York. It's a very rare book. It was printed in Pottstown, Pennsylvania, in 1889. And there weren't too many books printed in Pottstown in those days. But it's very authentic and highly regarded biographical sketches of his early days on the upper Missouri and the Great Plains. You hardly ever see it in catalogs anymore. It's a very fine copy. All book people like to boast about their finds.

GARDNER: Okay, you can go ahead while I look through it.

EPSTEIN: I think I gave you the wrong address. It was 619 Pine Avenue where my first bookshop was.

My records of 1932: as I mentioned, Abbey Bookshop was bought out by Phil Brown and Karl Zamboni. I think Bob Campbell opened on LeConte in Westwood in that year. There was another bookshop in Beverly Hills on Wilshire Boulevard called the Hall of Fame Bookshop. I know the shop, but I forget the people who ran it. I think a person by the name of Fillmore Phipps, if I'm not mistaken, was connected with it. He later went into some business connected with the motion picture business--not in acting, but in production. That's the year Dick and Bill Martindale,

brothers of Walter, opened a bookstore at 5310 1/2 Wilshire Boulevard, old books, and then they went into new books and magazines. There was a place called the Old Bookshop on 206 South Broadway. The Satyr Bookshop at one time had a store on Wilshire Boulevard, but they closed that up, and the only store they had left in 1932 was on Vine Street. In 1932 Jones' Bookshop finally closed. It had been in the process of going down, down, down from the time I first opened in Los Angeles. All these years they kept the name going, but they finally ran a sale and closed out. Sammy Reiser opened the Argonaut in 1933. Yes. The Hollywood Bookstore at that time was at 6716 1/2. They had a Catholic bookstore called C.F. Horan, at 120 West Second Street. (And of course there's the big church on Second and Main--what is it, St. Vivian's? St. Vivian's, I think it's called.) [St. Vibiana's] There was another store, the Open Bookshop at 8834 1/2 Sunset, which didn't last too long. There was a firm called Barbierri and Price which had a short run.

GARDNER: It seems that there was quite a turnover at this point, wasn't there?

EPSTEIN: Book businesses always had quite a turnover because people would start in without knowledge and without capital. They were visionaries, and they thought all they had to do was start in. They didn't want to start in with

the type of bookstore that their capital could carry, start in carrying little things. They wanted to start in the rare-book business. That was the case of Barbierri and Price. They might have had a few wealthy friends who might have added a few thousand dollars apiece into it until they found out that they couldn't carry on that type of business with just a little bit of money and not too much experience and not enough willingness to put out a great deal of physical elbow grease. A number of these went that way.

Miller's was already established [in 1933] at 6740 Hollywood Boulevard. Now it's turned into a stationery store opposite the Pickwick. The old man [Jesse Ray] Miller was quite a character. He had a store near USC. And when USC started expanding, they wanted his property, and he wouldn't sell it to them. And this went on for years and years, and USC owned all the property around him. But he was an individualistic character, and as long as he didn't want to sell it, any amount of money they offered him didn't make any difference because he didn't need money. He had made a lot of money in the college textbook business near USC. In those days, college textbook people made a lot of money. I don't know how they finally worked it out, but they built a building for him on Hollywood Boulevard, in which the Miller Stationery Store is now, a two-and-a-half-story building. And they finally got him to move out. He

ran the business just exactly the way he wanted, didn't care what anybody else did, what his competition did, what times were, whatever. And he maintained a room up in the second story of the building--where he lived. He had been married at one time and I suppose because of his oddness his marriage apparently didn't do too well, so he was batching it up in the second-story room. And one of the stories is--this is actually true, because he repeated it to me--he heard someone trying to break in downstairs at the back; so he looked out from a window from the second story and saw these people, and he started throwing canned goods at them. [laughter] He scared them away that way. Another very interesting story about him is that one Christmastime--in later years, after we'd been fairly well established on Hollywood Boulevard--there were so many people coming in to buy things (he had books and stationery and greeting cards and whatnot) that he became unhappy. There were just too many people in the store. So in the middle of the afternoon he just told everybody to get out, and he shut up for the day. And he didn't open till after Christmas. He didn't want to be bothered with so many people. And all the people would come into the Pickwick and say, "What's the matter with Miller's? They're closed today." This was during the height of the Christmas season. But he was that independent of things going on. He later died, and his brother

[Paul Burt Miller] inherited the property and the business. And he tried to run it for a while. In his own way, he was almost as eccentric as his brother. Of course, the business was not at all to his liking. He was a rancher. So he finally gave it [in 1951] to Ron Maxton, a nephew, who presently owns it--building, business, and all, which is a nice way to get started. [laughter]

A girl by the name of Tone Price got into the book business with Barbierri and Price. She was a very interesting character in the sense that she was, again, an odd personality. She started losing her mind. She was one of the first people I knew who had a lobotomy. It helped her for a while, but then she regressed. Of course, she had to give up the business in a number of years, and she finally died. As long as her mind was good, she was a good bookwoman--not a businesswoman, but a good bookwoman. She knew her books.

In 1935 there was a place which started out, the A-1 Bookshop, at 711 West Sixth Street. It was owned by Manny Borden. Manny Borden married a daughter of Morris Markowitz of the New York Bookstore, which opened up some time in '34, I believe. There's a story there that should be told. Morris Markowitz was a very interesting character. He started a little junky bookshop in the Bowery, in New York, and apparently did quite well. He used to handle old

magazines and remainders and any kind of cheap books and so forth. And apparently he did quite well because he moved his whole family out here--his son and a daughter and, of course, his wife--and they opened a store, the New York Bookstore, originally on South Main Street. Then they moved to West Sixth Street later on. And he brought a lot of his New York ideas of how to run a bookstore. It was a junky shop with every kind of thing imaginable in it. He was the first man I knew that really dealt any way knowledgeably with remainders. Remainders at that time weren't the things that they are now. He had a daughter, Sarah, and a son, David.

David got a doctorate from UCLA in Romance languages. But instead of purusing a profession in teaching or whatever--with a doctorate in languages, probably the only thing it could lead to is teaching or writing--he stayed in the old-book business. And he opened a shop of his own later. He was a peculiar character with a very funny voice. He knew his books thoroughly, but he was a very messy bookman. He wasn't messy about his person, but he would buy everything and just dump it in the cellar. He had a lot of valuable things. But unfortunately, he died of cancer at a very early age. He was a very nice boy, but he had a lot of peculiarities. It was unfortunate that he died, because I think eventually he might have turned

out to be a good bookman. A very fine mind, but undisciplined in the ways of business. The old gentleman, Mr. Morris Markowitz, died before his son died.

But to come back to Manny Borden and Sarah. He opened his own shop, as I said, and he later became acquainted--it might be by arrangement or whatever--and married Sarah Borden. They gave up their retail store, and they went into the publishing business and made quite a success of it. I talk to him quite often. They have a very talented daughter and several grandchildren. The daughter is a dancer and a dance teacher. She is pursuing that career in addition to raising a family.

GARDNER: Their company's in Alhambra, isn't it?

EPSTEIN: Yes, it's in Alhambra. It used to be on Wabash Avenue in City Terrace. I'm telling you these things as I run through them and, if anything, try to point up the characteristics of some of them. The Manny Borden and Sarah Markowitz story is very interesting. They had a lot of the New York ways of doing business. I used to buy things from them from time to time. There was a little bit of jealousy there, because every time I would buy a book for two dollars or one dollar, whatever it is--books were very cheap in those days--they would accuse me of, "Well, you're going to sell it for five dollars." They thought I was a miracle worker, which of course wasn't

true. In one instance I did buy a county history from them. At that time, the Los Angeles library was building up a good genealogical department, and any county history that they didn't have, they would buy. And I saw a county history at the Markowitz store, and I bought it on speculation, I thought, for about two, two and a half dollars. Well, I sold it to the public library, and I delivered it to the order department, acquisitions department. And there it was on their table or wherever I left it for them, and Sarah Markowitz came about some business there--we all used to sell to the library--and she saw that book there, "Five dollars." Well, I got a phone call. Was I berated! "You knew all the time. Why didn't you tell us to sell it?" "Look, Sarah, I'm in business for myself. You made your profit and I made my profit." "Yes, but you made two and a half dollars and we made maybe a dollar." For years she wouldn't talk to me, but we're very good friends now.

GARDNER: You mentioned the New York-style bookseller. What do you mean by that?

EPSTEIN: Well, by "New York-style bookseller," I meant--I should have said maybe Bowery-type New York bookseller, which of course are different from Scribner's and Brentano's in New York. They have had them here, too. They don't run a clean shop; they don't treat their customers with respect--

because in the Bowery, they looked upon anyone who walked in with suspicion because they were used to Bowery characters who would steal. And they would assume that all people were alike, which of course wasn't so. Not that people in Los Angeles were more honest, but that's a feeling you got. They treated you with not too much respect. In other words--let's put it this way--they were very crude in their manners. But they learned, and they mellowed out.

Then there was also the College Book Company on 721 West Sixth Street. West Sixth Street had maybe a dozen different bookstores there--from Holmes near Figueroa Street to the last secondhand one on Sixth Street till you got to Spring Street. The last one was, I think, Rogers' Bookstore. I don't know how I passed up Rogers, because he was--I didn't mention Rogers.

GARDNER: Oh, I think so. Didn't you?

EPSTEIN: Yes, I must have mentioned Rogers earlier, yes. Rogers' Bookstore. Rogers' was between Grand and Hope, opposite where I was. Dawson's, of course, was, as I mentioned, already on Grand Avenue. Then you had to skip all the way to Spring Street before you found the other secondhand bookstores.

I mentioned the College Book Company, which is run by David Lawyer. He also had a store in Pasadena. And he would deal a great deal in textbooks. He was a very difficult character in many ways. There are probably

stories I could tell about him, but I could go on for the next twenty years. We don't have that much time.

GARDNER: How about just one, as a sampler?

EPSTEIN: Well, again, you see, I used to buy many books from other book dealers. I used to make it my habit, say, once a month to go to Pasadena, once a month or once a week run down through the stores on Sixth Street. If they had something, we'd buy it from them and so forth. Well, again he took me to task one time for buying books from him for two dollars and selling them for five or six. And I said, "Would it make any difference to you if Joe Jones came in here and paid you two dollars for this book and took it home, and I paid you two dollars for this book and found a customer for it for three dollars and made a dollar? What the hell difference is it to you?" But he could never see that. He was very jealous. And he passed a rumor around--we had a meeting at our house. He wasn't even at that meeting. We were living at 1914 North Curson. There was a meeting for some reason or other of used booksellers. The group was forming, and one of the meetings was at my house. And somebody must have told him, "Louis Epstein lives in a mansion on North Curson." He probably lived in, maybe, a small flat. And he said, "Well, you live in a great big mansion. Why don't you tell me where I can sell that book"--which was totally insignificant.

For that reason he became angry with me. He had an employee working for him who came to me asking for a job. The chap's name was H. Richard Archer. Now, Dick Archer is now a librarian, a famous librarian. I'm trying to think what library. [Williams College] He's pretty well known. Richard Archer came to me asking for a job. He was working for David Lawyer. David Lawyer didn't make any friends. And they became personal friends, and for one reason or another they had a separation of friendship. So Dick came to me one day asking for a job, and I said, "Okay, I can give you part-time work"--he was still going to school--"for a few weeks, and hoping maybe that business will get better, and maybe give you full time, or if you make up catalogs for me." He was an extremely active person, and he had a great love for books, and he had a bibliographical sense--which pushed him into the library field. So before he came to work for me, he brought me a long questionnaire. Instead of me giving him a questionnaire asking for references, everything about him, he brought one about me--the hours, the pay, the overtime, vacations, exactly what his work was to be. And so I said, "What are you asking me all these questions for? You know what you have to do in a bookstore. For me, if you come in the morning, you have to help sweep the store, you have to a answer the phone, books come in, you have to help me take them out of the car." He said, "I don't mean all that. I

know all that." I said, "Well, why?" He said, "Well, if you had ever worked for David Lawyer, you'd know why." Because he had him doing all kinds of menial things, even taking things to his home and helping him clean up his house. That's the kind of person he was--a character. He later moved to Montana, and if I'm not mistaken, he's still running a business out of some barn there, mostly in old fiction. He started specializing in that. That was a peculiar thing with Archer, the way he presented me with that. It was a most unusual thing. [laughter]

There was another Catholic bookstore, run by John J. Bodkin on 206 South Main Street. Fowler Brothers in 1935 moved from South Broadway to West Sixth Street, at the address where they still are, 414.* And I remember Ward Fowler used to come into my place on Eighth Street. Ward Fowler was the second generation of Fowlers. He was at one time a sportswriter for the Times. Then the World War [I] came along, and he enlisted in the Lafayette Escadrille. He was one of the members of that. He had no special interest in the book business. And when they were on Broadway, they had a chap by the name of Charlie Hixon who used to run the place for him.

There are a lot of stories told about him. The travelers who used to sell new books used to say that

* They've recently moved to West Seventh Street.--L.E.

when you made a date with Charlie Hixon, you never saw him at his store. You had to call him or call on him at the store, and you had to make a date for dinner and the theater. And he used that to full advantage. He'd order the finest dinner with the finest wine and the finest drinks, go to the best theater, all at the expense of the publisher. He used to use them quite a bit. But apparently he was a good bookman. I knew him, but by the time I was getting started in new books he was on the way out--as a matter of fact, was out. The Fowler Brothers later let him go because I think they might have found something irregular in what he was doing in the shop. I wouldn't swear to that.

So Ward Fowler used to come into my store on Eighth Street. He used to park his car west of me, so he used to walk by my door. They were forced to give up their location on Broadway. Well, he was deathly afraid that would be the death of the Fowler Brothers, because they had been on Broadway for so many years and now they were moving to Sixth Street, which didn't have anywhere near the traffic that Broadway had. But Broadway had changed its face. It had become a women's shopping area--for shoes, dresses, and whatnot. They were about a half a block from the May Company. But he was very fearful. And I tried to tell him, "Well, Broadway isn't what it was ten years ago, even

in my experience." Cheaper stores were coming in. At any rate, it was quite a move to make, after being so long in one location. So they took that location on Sixth Street, and you know, about three or four months after they had opened, I stopped in the store on Sixth Street and I talked to Ward. I said, "How's it working?" And he said, "Louis, you have no idea how much better things are here. We get a different kind of person altogether." He said, "You get the professional man, the lawyer, the doctor, the businessman, the accountant, and whatnot." And he said, "They buy better books and more books." So they were happy with their change.

GARDNER: Well, that's what you found in that area, too, didn't you?

EPSTEIN: Yes.

GARDNER: That sort of clientele.

EPTSEIN: Yes. While we were getting the young lawyers and the smaller businessman, very few of the real big businessmen would come to a secondhand bookstore. Occasionally, if it was a real book lover, they would go to Dawson's or come to us and pick up a lot of books. I really shouldn't say that, because we had a lot of professional men, doctors and lawyers, buying from us. And some of them were quite wealthy. One doctor in particular--he was a New Englander and he had that New England accent. He must have been a

downeaster from Maine, because I think he spoke that nasal Maine talk that's supposed to be common up there. I don't remember his name now. I could, with a little research, find out his name. (Lovejoy) But he taught me a lot. He taught me that the New England Yankee is the stiffest bargainer of any person I ever met in the world. The Greeks and the Jews and the Armenians can't stand up to him. But with all that, I liked him. He used to buy books about the sea, anything connected with the sea, especially pertaining to the New England coast: whaling, books about whaling and whalers and whaling ships and the artifacts that the whalers made--scrimshaw, books about scrimshaw. You know, there are so many different kinds of books that no one can fathom [it]. If you're interested in a subject, you can start collecting and spend your life collecting in any small area of a certain subject. Well, his was that subject. The way he made it was quite broad, but still within a certain framework--which is an art to do, and he did it well. And he told me that his library had already been willed to the Essex Institute, I think it's in Massachusetts, an institute pertaining to New England sailing in the early days, the whaling ships and people like that. But he was a customer I will never forget. Unlike the customer I mentioned to you in our other interview who really took advantage of me, this man, although he

would bargain with me--in those days you had to bargain; you had to get that dollar somehow or other--if he thought that I was hungry, he would give me money. That wasn't the point. But the other man was just a mean man. This person was not a mean person, but he liked to get a New England bargain. So there was a difference between the two. We had doctors, dentists, and whatnot who used to come in. We had a crossroads of everybody.

GARDNER: What was his name?

EPSTEIN: I can't think of his name. If I would look in the phone book--I'm pretty sure he was a dermatologist. If I could find a phone book of that period.

GARDNER: We can get that later on.

EPSTEIN: I don't know anybody in the book business now who would remember his name. Maybe Jake might. How far was I? How did I get started? We were talking about Lawyer.

GARDNER: It was Fowler's, I guess.

EPSTEIN: Fowler's. We got to Fowler's, then we got to him. And then I used to buy a lot of books at Fowler's. You would be wondering why I say that I used to buy books Fowler's. They used to go through their stock each year and pull out the things that weren't selling, and they'd put them down in the basement of their Sixth Street store. Well, I was working with old books and getting library lists from time to time and would need books of that type.

Or somebody would ask me for a book eight, ten, twelve years old. So they allowed me to go down to their basement and pick out what I want. We had a set price. I would pay him 20 percent of the original published price. In other words, if a book was $2.50 originally, I would pay him fifty cents. Well, I found many, many books there over the years that libraries wanted; and if I'd find a $2.50 book, I'd buy it for fifty cents and then sell it to the library for $1.00, $1.25. In those days you could work with that kind of margin; now you wouldn't cross the street to earn seventy-five cents. And of course I didn't do it book by book. I would buy fifteen, twenty, twenty-five books. And every once in a while I would find a book that had in a relatively short period of time become quite rare. Some book in which an author zoomed up--like some of the modern authors. Who's that poet from Big Sur?

GARDNER: Jeffers?

EPSTEIN: Robinson Jeffers. I found one or two early Jeffers books of poetry in first edition. Well, when they first put them on the shelf, nobody knew Jeffers. I found a copy of The Californian by him, a first edition. It was a review copy, with a review stamp on the title page, which made it all the better instead of worse. As a rule, it made it better because it definitely fixed it as an early issue.

I found a copy of the same book with the same thing at a store in Santa Barbara once--Osborne's. That was the fun, that I used to go like to look for things. I not only made an extra profit out of that, but it was fun discovering things. No store was out of my métier. I would always go--even any kind of junk store, if there was any chance of looking at a book, I would do so.

TAPE NUMBER: VI, SIDE ONE

JUNE 11, 1974

GARDNER: You were about to talk about Mr. Ruick.

EPSTEIN: Yes, in connection with Fowler Brothers. I'm glad I reminded myself of it, because somewhere I have a note about him but I don't know where it is at the moment. Virgil Ruick, spelled like Buick except with an "R." When anybody asked how to spell his name, that's how he expressed himself. Virgil was a buyer, one of the last buyers for the Fowlers. A very nice chap. He was a very good churchman. I think he belonged to the Presbyterian church on Wilshire Boulevard, on the south side of Wilshire Boulevard, just west of Vermont. I remember going to that church for his funeral. I think it was a Presbyterian church. Not being of the faith, it's hard for me to keep one separate from the other. He was an excellent bookman and a very nice person. Over the years we became acquainted with him, and as I went into the new-book business, he was one of the people we called when we were talking about the publication dates. He attended that meeting. And he was one of those who was complaining because others were breaking the date, and he was one of those who you had to convince that this whole thing was totally foolish, that it could be controlled by the publishers if they wanted to--but they didn't want to, for reasons that I explained,

because they got their money six months earlier. [phone rings] So it was my task one time to invite Virgil to accept the presidency of the Southern California Booksellers Association. He was very reluctant to, and as a member of the board. . . . [tape stopped] Excuse me for the interruption. So I called to ask him to become president of the association. And he was very reluctant to become president. "Oh," he said, "Louis, I'm not big enough for the job," and all that. I said, "Virgil, you've been in the book business all these many years. You represent a very fine name in the book community. You're very well liked by everybody. You must take the job. Number one, it's recognition that you should have; and number two, it's recognition for your firm. I mean, how are we going to honor anyone in the book business except his contemporaries choose him to be their leader? True, it's no great organization, but we do something, and we maintain a relationship. We sit down and talk out a problem, we settle arguments, and we have been effective in many ways." With all that reluctancy, I finally got him to accept it. He made an excellent president. Excellent. He had a very good sense of humor. And he had another distinction: he was an exact replica of President Eisenhower. [laughter] His head was balding, and he wasn't quite as tall. But he was a good person. By "good," I mean

regardless of how good a bookman. When I say "a good person," it has nothing to do with his success or nonsuccess in the business. But he was a thoughtful person and he had a regard for people. And as I say, he was a very good churchman, which I respect in a person who believes.

I'm glad I thought to mention Virgil because no history of the book business, in relation to the book business, would be complete without him.

GARDNER: He finally accepted to be president.

EPSTEIN: Oh, yes. As I say, he accepted it and became a very good president. He was elected for a second term; we usually elected for a second term. And, you know, in later years he thanked me for pressing him. I had the same experience with Dave Jamison of Pasadena, of Vroman's. Vroman's, of course, belongs in here. They predated everybody here except Fowler's. That's a Pasadena history, but then, Vroman's had a lot of Los Angeles customers, [was] well known in the area, and later went into the wholesale book business. But that is a story that's been written up on several occasions. As a matter of fact, I ran across an item just the other day where they were opening a wholesale warehouse and they had some sort of a celebration. And Doubleday printed up an article by Larry Powell. And I have it right here; I'll show it to you. That was in that lot of books I picked up Saturday. [tape stopped]

I had the same experience with David Jamison, who'd been a buyer for Vroman's for many, many years--an excellent bookman, an excellent bookman. And he belonged to the association; Vroman's was represented. They would take a board membership, a board of directors membership. But they'd say, "Well, we don't have time"--this and that. I said, "Look, you've got just as much time as I have. I was president, and I gave a lot of time." And I too had to convince him that he could consider it almost a duty to himself and a duty to his firm to accept the recognition of his contemporaries. As far as I'm concerned, perhaps the most satisfactory thing outside maybe of making a good living out of it and making a sizable sum of dollars out of it, the next best thing I could think of--the others are practical, but as far as a personal thing--I consider the personal satisfaction of having been recognized by my contemporaries as a man they want to be their leader at some time or other. And I think a man who is in such a position owes it to take that kind of a job, instead of saying, "Well, I'm too busy." Everybody's busy in the book business. The book business is a very jealous mistress of time. True.

For the record, there's the chap by the name of Kovach, Nick Kovach, who had a bookstore at 727 West Sixth Street some time in 1935. He later went into the

periodicals business, out-of-print periodicals, and established a very good business. Recently he's been cutting down on his activities. He's a contemporary of mine, about my age, born in Hungary. He has a son who's become quite a geologist, a PhD in geology, and did a lot of work for the government in analyzing the stuff they brought back from the moon. He himself is a brilliant guy. Erratic in some ways but, nevertheless, a knowledgeable book person. That's the way I have to judge him, from what we're doing. As far as what we're doing, I have to judge them on the basis of how good bookmen they were.

Moby Dick Bookshop started at 641 South Grand in September 1935. The story behind Moby Dick, as far as my relations are concerned--the name was adopted by Bill Shuman. Shuman, if you will remember, is the man who sold me my first bookstore in Long Beach. After he sold out to me, he played around with whatever number of things, and he got married to a woman who later became a disciple of Aimee Semple McPherson, and who took all his money away from him and gave it to Aimee. That was one of the things that bothered him. Bill Shuman opened a store after he sold out to me--a year, two, three years after, I forget the exact date--in San Diego, on Broadway and Eighth, I think. And there he built up a very nice business--not a rare-book business, because he didn't have the knowledge

or the background to acquire the knowledge of becoming a rare-book man. And he wasn't in a community where he could learn, because in those days in San Diego they didn't have the market, nor the people, nor the collectors that they had in Los Angeles whom he could learn from. Magazines, a few books, some books, he used to pick up, but he became the largest of the few secondhand booksellers in San Diego. I would say--to use the term--the "kingpin" of that particular type of business in San Diego. And I used to visit him from time to time. We'd drive down to San Diego, stay a couple days, and we used to visit the bookstores. And I would find a lot of good books in his store, and I would buy from him. We kept exchanging letters over a time; he used to write me. One day I received a letter from him saying that he had an opportunity to sell his store, and he would like to come to Los Angeles and open a store. He thought he could do very well here. He had built up a business in San Diego; he could just as easily build up a business in Los Angeles. The minute I read the letter, I thought he would be making a mistake if he did, because if he came back to Los Angeles, he would have all the other well-established, experienced book people to work against. He would not have the field to himself as he had in San Diego, where he was doing very well.

Well, that very afternoon, a couple, a young couple--very young--came into my store, introduced themselves.

Bill Wahrenbrock, or whatever, and his wife. He had graduated I think from Occidental or Pomona or whatever. And they wanted to go in the book business. And they said they were looking around; they found a place in San Diego. I said, "I know. You're talking about this shop," and I mentioned Bill Shuman's shop. They said, "Yes, how did you know?" "Well," I said, "this is a perfect coincidence. I have a letter, just received this morning, from Mr. Shuman, asking my advice, whether he should sell his shop. And I'm going to give you advice, and I'm going to write him advice. And this is what the advice is going to be: I will tell him he is a fool if he sells it, and I will tell you you would be a fool if you did not buy it." [laughter] And you know, they worked out a deal, and he sold it. And it was the most regrettable thing that he ever did.

He tried to make off that he wasn't sorry later, and he did later move to Los Angeles and open the Moby Dick Bookshop, first on Grand Avenue; then within a year he had to move out. (He had temporary leases because Wilshire Boulevard came through right there, if you remember. Wilshire didn't come through to Grand then. When they cut Wilshire through to Grand, a certain number of buildings had to come down. His was one of them. It was a small hotel building.) Then he moved to West Seventh Street, and he was forced out of that--West Seventh, east

of Figueroa. Then he moved across Figueroa, where there had been an old Buick agency, Hoffman Buick. You wouldn't remember; that was before your time. He was in business there for quite some time. And he kept up a correspondence with Wahrenbrock, the man who bought him out, and Wahrenbrock kept telling him how well he was doing. And this poor man was doing very poorly. He was too proud to tell me, but I could recognize it. To this day, I can walk into a bookstore and almost sense whether they were prosperous or not prosperous and their whole attitude towards books and also their stock. Well, Shuman did not make the success he had hoped he would make in Los Angeles--which I had told him would be very difficult if he did come because there were a lot of very strong booksellers in the area at that time. Holmes, myself--it was my most active period in the used-book business. And Lofland and Russell and this, that, and the other--who were well known. People would think of selling a book, they would call Holmes or call Louis Epstein or call Dawson. So he didn't get the cream of everything that was offered like he did in San Diego, where he was probably the only one who even ran an ad.

I watched him. He became more and more erratic. He later told me that [it was] because his wife insisted that he had to come to Los Angeles. There may be some truth to it, because there was a peculiar relationship between them. And, you know, he went off his rocker. And I think that

was the main cause. He was getting letters how well [Wahrenbrock] was doing. He showed me the letters. And then he would write back, and I'm sure he didn't tell them he wasn't doing well. But he tried to keep up appearances that he was doing well. But one day his widow called me up and said, "Bill had to go to the hospital"; then she later told me why. But he didn't last very long after that.

I didn't like her one bit, because she was a shrew in the sense that she forced him to do things that he wouldn't normally want to do. She used to take large sums of money--for those days from that kind of a person--to take out of his capital, which he might have reinvested in his business and maybe have done better. He later told me how unhappy he was. So the combination of both, I imagine, drove him off his normal mind.

I tell you that story because it's a bit of humanity pertaining to the book business. But the Wahrenbrocks prospered very, very well, and it wasn't till a few days ago that he sold out--at a very good price. And the store still exists under that name.

GARDNER: Is it still used books?

EPSTEIN: Yeah, but it's the funniest thing: that I had to tell one of them, "You would be a fool to sell," and the other one, "You would be a fool not to buy." I was honest with both of them. And I wrote Bill Shuman. I

told him this couple was in. And I told him exactly what I told them. I said, "I told them that you would be a fool to sell, and I told them also that if they had the opportunity, if you insisted on selling, that they would be foolish not to buy the store." That's the beginning and the ending of poor Moby Dick.

Nineteen thirty-five was the year that Stanley Rose moved to 6661 1/2 Hollywood Boulevard. Jake Zeitlin--I could spend as much time on Jake as I did heretofore on the whole interview. There are so many things one could talk about Jake. But I'm sure you will talk to Jake and undoubtedly get his [story]. I think Jake's archives have already been given to UCLA. But there was a relationship between myself and Jake. I told you about how he started. When he started, he needed my stock; and when I started, I wanted it back. [laughter]

GARDNER: You took it back, right.

EPSTEIN: But there was a relationship with myself and Jake which was quite close. We were friendly enough so that when he got into trouble, which he did from time to time. . . . And by "trouble," I don't mean evil things. He had an unfortunate marriage with his first wife and also with his second. I'm not telling you any secrets about Jake's life. I'm sure that anyone that knows Jake knows about it. He needed help many times. And he started with no capital, and

the Depression came along. With all his problems, he had to have help from time to time. Well, he had moved from the Hope Street, then he moved to Sixth Street west of Hope, and finally he moved to Sixth Street at 614. No, 614 is west of Hope. Later he moved to five hundred and something, when he had a real fancy shop. But at each turn Jake was in with people--and I'm not blaming any people--he was, I think, doing things for which he was not financially prepared to do. He was ahead of his time in planning something for his financial status. So he always had to rely on someone else for capital--which is a very dangerous thing. If one puts in capital, one wants a part of running the establishment. And Jake was a smart bookman; he never had anyone with him who knew the business as he did. And Jake is a brilliant person. The longer I know him, the more I realize how brilliant he is. And he's proven it by the pinnacle of success he's attained. Jake is getting up in years, and he's tiring a little bit; but his mind is extremely active, and he's still doing big things. He's doing bigger things now than he ever did in his life, which I'm very happy and very proud for him.

But in those days he used to run into many problems where a fifty-dollar bill saved his life. And I'm not ashamed to say it, and I don't think Jake would be ashamed to hear me say it because we've talked about this many times.

(Not that I want to broadcast this for all the world to see; if I published a book, I would never put it in a book. But as a portion of my life related to him, it was one of the things.) I helped him on a number of occasions, a number of very severe emergencies, and I'm not sure there were others that did the same thing. I'm not meaning to tell you that I'm the guy that saved his life. He had many friends. But sometimes the friend at hand is the guy that has to do something. And I was very happy that I was able to do it. And to this day, we sometimes get together and talk about old days, how really rugged it was, what a dollar meant to us.

GARDNER: What was his background?

EPSTEIN: Jake had come from Texas. He was an unsettled young man. He was very much interested in poetry. There was a chap in Chicago called Ben Abramson, who later ran the Argus Bookshop. How Jake met Ben Abramson, I don't know, but Ben Abramson sort of influenced him into the area of poetry and books. Jake apparently wasn't too well, so he came to California. And he was having one hell of a time. He had this wife; she was a little mixed-up. They had a daughter. And his Texas background, I know so little about that I shouldn't even be talking about it because I'm not sure of my facts. But he was interested in books, so he came here and they got him a job at Holmes's secondhand bookstore. (And I told you what a peculiar

character Mr. Holmes was. I still refer to him as "Mr. Holmes," the only guy I referred to [that way] in the business. Or I would refer to "Mr. Parker," instead of "Joe" or "Jake.") And, of course, with Holmes, he couldn't get along. Jake's type of character couldn't possibly get along with Holmes, so he didn't last but a few weeks there. Then he went to work for Bullock's. He was there for quite some time. That's where he was working when I first opened my shop. During the lunch hour from Bullock's, all these bookish people would swarm down Sixth Street, or from all other areas, and browse through the bookstores during their lunch hour. And that's why there I first met Jake, before he had his store. As I said, I could go on; the stories we had with Jake could last for days.

GARDNER: How did he get involved in the history of science, which became his specialty, really?

EPSTEIN: I guess because the opportunity knocked at his door and he was quick enough to see it. Jake is an excellent scholar; he has a phenomenal memory. He'll hear something or see something once, and he will remember it forever after. He surprised me with something just the other day, a few weeks ago. I was in his shop for something or other--we had a meeting or whatever--and he showed me a print by George Bellows. (His most famous prints were about prizefighters. They have a lot of vitality to them,

a lot of action.) He showed me a print that he had just bought. I don't know whether he went to the home [of] the person who sold him the print or brought it to the shop; it doesn't matter. He said, "I saw that print and I remembered reading a magazine article which had that print reproduced." And he said, "I remember what magazine it was, and I remember the year." He found the issue of the magazine, and he went back, got the print--which was going to help him sell it. And this goes back maybe thirty years, when he read that article. Unlike mine, I don't think his memory's slipping even a little. I don't think it's slipping yet. Let's hope it never does. Not every older man loses part of his memory. Not everyone has hardening of the arteries of the head. (That's what it is, you know, to a great deal. That's what I'm told.) So Jake's story I'm sure will come out. [tape stopped]

As I said, Stanley Rose moved to his location next to Musso's at that time. There was a bookstore on Sixth Street called the Golden Bough. It was a nice bookstore for a while. And then Sammy Reiser, as I said, in 1936--he probably opened the store in 1935 at 1603 North Cahuenga. Then there was a Thor's Book and Magazine Shop at 112 West Ninth Street. And the New York Bookstore, which moved to 310 South Main. I have a note: in 1937 Bunster Creeley bought the Abbey. I have a note on here. There was a shop called Pioneer Bookshop, which was an outgrowth of

Paul Kuttner's store. There was a bookshop in Hollywood called Verne's Hollywood Bookshop, on North Cahuenga. As of 1937, Dillon Bookshop at 628 West Eighth Street: it was John Dillon and his wife. He was an Indian, and his wife was American. But they were both very much interested in occult books. And they ran a nice small shop, never very big, never amounted to a great deal. Then somebody opened a bookshop on Figueroa Street called Figueroa Bookshop.

Then there was a shop called Hollander and Davidson Fine Books, at 602 West Sixth Street. Davidson bought in. Hollander, I think, had been a partner of Jake's when they had that location on Sixth Street. Jake had a location on Sixth Street before he had that one west of Hope. Why I don't have it, I don't know. But it was just west of Grand. Jake and Hollander, I think it was, had opened this very fine little bookstore designed by Frank Lloyd Wright. They put a lot of nice pictures, and of course, Hollander was the money man. They did a pretty fine business. But if they had to answer you if they had a book or not, instead of writing out a postcard, they sat down, dictated a letter, and the secretary would type it up on fine stationery and so forth. It was fine, but it didn't prove profitable. I suppose the usual differences of salary draw and whatnot--whatever happens to a partnership. Partnerships are very dangerous things at best, and the few that succeed are far exceeded by those that don't succeed because of clash of

personality--especially in such a personalized business as the book business is, where your own taste and direction lead you on. And if you have a conflict of taste and direction, you're dead. So I think the chap by the name of Davidson came out from the East and bought Jake's share. Now, this goes back a long time. I'm pretty positive that's the way it was. They went on for a number of years--oh, I wouldn't say even a number of years, maybe two years or somewhere in that span of time--when they closed out. Davidson, as I recollect, put in, in those days, a very big sum of money, something like $7- or $8,000 into the business. That's the way they measured money in those days. They didn't prosper. It was started from the wrong angle. It had no base. And they were building on something neither one of them had the experience. When Jake walked out of there, all the experience walked out of there, all the knowledge. Then the store became vacant.

There was a place on Hollywood Boulevard called the Research Magazine and Book Shop, which was run by a chap by the name of Nielson, at 7064 Hollywood Boulevard. There was a Technical Book Company at 808 South Spring Street at that time. They later moved to further up around Third and Spring, and now moved--it was John Ruby's place. Do you know Ruby in Westwood?

GARDNER: I know who he is, yes.

EPSTEIN: Yeah. It's an outgrowth of that. Different owners, I think. People by the name of Woodward or Woodruff owned it. They had a place in San Francisco and another place on Spring Street. Then things became bad for them, so they sold out.

I might mention that during my span of time, there were two or three Jewish bookshops. There was Gans' Bookstore at 2427 Brooklyn Avenue. Later it moved to Fairfax. Nice old man, name of Gans. He used to buy English books from me from time to time if he needed them, something he needed. I always recommended him to others. Then in the Jewish-book field there was another chap. There was a Mrs. [Bertha G.] Blatt. I'll come to that in a little while.

Of course, in that area, Pickwick had moved to Hollywood in the early part of '38. Moby Dick moved over, as I said, west of Figueroa Street. Jake started a store at 624 South Carondelet Street. You know where the Otis Art Institute is?

GARDNER: Yeah.

EPSTEIN: Originally it had been the Otis mansion, and 624 South Carondelet was the carriage house of the Otis mansion, which was right behind the Otis Art Institute. And Jake had this great big barn, and they created living quarters overhead.

GARDNER: Did he have the other shop at the same time?

EPSTEIN: No, he gave up the other shop and opened that. By that time, he was already married to Ver Brugge, Josephine. And if I may put it in here, I credit Josephine with being the leveling instrument that gave rise to Jake's progress from then on--little by little, but on solid ground.

GARDNER: In what sense?

EPSTEIN: She helped him; she worked with him. None of his wives had helped him before in actual work. She did all the secretarial work and actually helped build up the business. She's very capable and a very level-headed woman, and she didn't mind working very hard with him. I have the utmost respect for her, I really do. I think without her, Jake might not have succeeded as well. He might have been a good bookman, but he wouldn't have attained the heights of success that he has today, I'm positive. He never could have achieved it without Josephine. I think Josephine kept him from flying before he could run. Jake always liked to do that. And I'm not criticizing it as a fault, because, look, if you don't think of those things, you don't do those things. But before that, he was doing things beyond his capabilities financially--not necessarily beyond his capabilities of planning and thinking and actual doing, but he didn't have the tools to do them with. And she wouldn't let him do things without having first a firm base from which to do it. So I credit her. I credit Josephine--whom

I like very, very much--for a great deal of Jake's later success.

There was a Braun and Reinhold Bookroom at 6731 1/2 Hollywood Boulevard--I mention that particularly because Mr. Braun was a German refugee. We're in '39, now, you know. He got out before the real bad time. He had a small bookshop in the arcade of stores Aaron owns now.

GARDNER: It must have been very small.

ESPTEIN: It was. But he was a fine old man. I used to visit with him because we were just a few doors away. Whenever he needed an English book, he'd come and buy it from us. We'd give him a discount or tell him where he could get it if we didn't have it.

At 1608 North Vine Street there was a chap by the name of Salop. Salop came out here from New York. His brother was the first big operator in remainder books in New York, and he was with his brother for a while, for a number of years. This man's name was Morris. His brother's name was Max. (Now that I think of it, I'd better put it down.) Morris Salop was a man who, for whatever the reason, I didn't like. And there were very few book people that I didn't like. He would get remainders from his brother at a very low price, far below the price that I could buy from his brother, because his brother ran a wholesale house--and we did buy some books from his brother. He would sell them below anything we could sell them for.

His brother used to call on us, and we'd constantly tell him about it and write to him about it. And he said, well, he always promised his brother he would never cut the price. And he never kept his promise. He was a peculiar man. I'm sure he had his good points. He had a son who became a very fine music critic and I think teaches music history at some big university in the Michigan area--I forget, Indiana or Michigan or Michigan State. But the son never worked with him. Morris sometimes acted as if he was a mean man; I'm not positive, really, that he was.

I will bring in something here that maybe belongs here, maybe doesn't; I don't know. There was always a Jewish organization in the community. Well, I was integrated in the Jewish community in various ways. During the bad times in the thirties, there was considerable pressure for relief money for overseas. That was long before the tremendous drives for tremendous sums of money that was needed later. If we knew then what we learned later, we would have probably tried to raise those kinds of sums of money. But we didn't know to what point Hitler was going to go. At any rate, things were beginning to develop where there was a lot of relief money needed all over the world. People were running. Jews were running. So it became a very personal thing with me and all of the people in the community--what we owe to our brothers. So

I would contribute sums of money, which for those days were small sums, but they were measurable, comparable to what was needed from a man of my circumstances in those days. In other words, nobody asked me for a thousand dollars, and I never gave a thousand dollars in those days. But I would give whatever sum I felt I could afford to give for the causes as needed in those days. And it was for local relief and other things, too.

I received a phone call one day from one of the members of the board of the Jewish community, and he said, "Louis, are you the only Jewish bookseller in the city?" I said, "No. There's Jake, there's Walker, there's Dave Kohn, there's so-and-so, Salop." He says, "Well, look. You are appointed the head of a committee of booksellers. We'll give you cards. We in the community want you to go and solicit the Jewish booksellers for these various things." So I said, "Look. They're all poor people." "Whatever they give." So, all right, my duty was pointed out to me, so I pursued it. And I think I went out and spent about three afternoons at it. I went down to Walker; he gave me, I think, a dollar. I went to Dave Kohn--a very fine soul, but a poor man. And by the time I got through, I think I gave him a dollar. But everybody was cooperative to the thinking of it. They apologized they couldn't give more. Mr. Markowitz, a very generous man in every respect.

He was a fine person, but he didn't have the knowledge of proper relationship to proper people because he was always in that Bowery area. So when I said he didn't treat his customers properly, it's the only thing he ever learned. But he himself personally was a very fine and generous man.

Anyway, I finally went out to Hollywood to see this Mr. Salop. (And if I shouldn't tell this story, I hope I'm forgiven.) And he may have had a philosophy against certain things; I don't know. But I sat down, and I talked to him. I said, "Morris, they are after Jews. And we've got to get them out. You yourself were born on the other side. What would happen if you hadn't gotten out?" "Well," he said, "I've been here a long time. I was in the navy." "What difference does that make? We need money." You know, I was never so incensed about anything--and I've solicited a lot of people, and I've had the door slammed in my face when I asked for money and got nothing, and I was angry with some people. But in this case, I was truly incensed. After long argument and after his wife--she was working in the back; she always worked with him--heard all this talk, she came out and said, "Morris, make a donation." And you know what he did? He pulled out fifty cents. And I blew my top, I just blew my top. I said, "Morris, am I a waiter? Am I a cabdriver? Did I shine your shoes? I've been talking to you, and you have no idea what I've been talking

about. I've been talking about keeping people alive, hundreds of them. If you can't give me anything, tell me. And if you need help, tell me, and I'll get you some help. I'll help you myself, if I can. Why do you offer me fifty cents?" Fifty cents. And in those days he was considered well-to-do, because he sold half his business to his brother, and his brother was operating a profitable business. His brother, I think, forced him out of the business because he irritated people. And that was one of the most disagreeable things that ever happened to me. I'll never forget it. He took out fifty cents.

TAPE NUMBER: VI, SIDE TWO

JUNE 17, 1974

GARDNER: To begin with, I thought perhaps we could recapitulate some of your family life, then maybe some more about Louis Epstein's bookstore. When we left off, really, with your personal life, you were recently married and Aaron had just been born; and you were, I think, still living over with your parents in Boyle Heights.

EPSTEIN: Well, no, we weren't living with my parents after our marriage. We never lived with my parents after we were married. Our first abode after we were married was an apartment at Fifth and Catalina, then an apartment in the 700 block of South Carondelet, then to a flat on Cincinnati Street in Boyle Heights (where Aaron was born) in the heart of the Jewish community. Then we moved to an apartment in the Hancock Park area near Fifth Street just west of Vermont a few blocks. Aaron came in the first nine months after we were married. He was a right-on-time baby. [laughter] We were anticipating Aaron's coming; we moved to Boyle Heights just before Aaron was born because our family was there and my sisters might help my wife with Aaron after he came. Actually, my wife claimed she'd never held a baby in her arms before, so she needed some help. However, after a few months we moved out of Boyle Heights. We moved temporarily to the beach [Rose Avenue in Ocean Park].

Then we got a place in Beverly Hills. In those days it wasn't as expensive as it is today, even proportionately. It was just a block east of La Cienega on Hamilton Drive, 112 North Hamilton, right next to Wilshire Boulevard. A curious thing about that (nothing in relation to the life of the bookstore or myself): it was a two-story house, and the people renting upstairs had a dog. And the dog had the privileges of the yard, so we couldn't put Aaron in the yard. We had to take Aaron outside the yard and put him in his crib in the driveway. Well, we soon got tired of that and bought our own house in Hollywood. We lived in Hollywood ever since 1934.

GARDNER: Where was that first house that was on Curson?

EPSTEIN: At 1914 North Curson, which is adjoining the Wattles estate--which is now the Wattles Park. The children grew up there. Eugene came, of course, four years after Aaron. Their birthdays are ten days apart. And Eugene hadn't had any other address until we moved to Hollywood, which was a period of twenty-three years. And of course he wasn't twenty-three; but all his life, until he was in his twenties, the only address he had was Curson. When we were moving, at the time he was at Harvard--he'd already finished Caltech and was at Harvard--he wrote back, "You can't do that. I won't know my way home!" But they enjoyed living up there. Living on a hill with children,

of course, has its problems, and Ann had her problems. She had to drive them everywhere, although they walked to school after they were old enough to take care of themselves--which helped to strengthen their legs, certainly. And they enjoyed climbing up and down the hills. They knew that territory backward and forward. As a matter of fact, one time there had been an accident up on the little road above us which was like a fire road. And of course we knew that road and where it went to and how to get up and down it because we used to hike up there. The firemen's equipment couldn't get up there--the hook-and-ladder--and so Eugene and Andy [Aaron] showed them shortcuts how to climb up the hill from just about where our house is. They had to wind up the hill by foot. They helped the firemen that day quite a bit.

GARDNER: Were you all the way at the top of Curson?

EPSTEIN: No, no. We were at 1914. The last house up the hill was at that time the number 2000, twenty hundred. And that is the house [in which] the chaps [who own] where we have our lunch, the Levine boys [Henry and Phil] lived. They now own the Lee Drugstore on the corner of Hollywood and Highland. Philip Levine used to walk down to our house, wait for me, and then I would take him to school when I took our kids--because at that time I was still in business downtown. I would drop off Eugene at Gardner [Avenue School], Aaron at Bancroft [Junior High School], and Phil at Hollywood

High [School], besides a couple of other kids I'd pick up. One of the little girls we used to pick up came in several years ago with her children, who were older than she was at the time I used to pick her up--a girl by the name of Barbara Bein. A very nice girl of very nice family. I think she is still a customer of Pickwick. Most of the dealing was by telephone, but occasionally she'd come in with her children. I'd always get a great deal of bang out of seeing them.

GARDNER: Who were some of the other neighbors in the area?

EPSTEIN: Phil Goldstone lived a few houses north across the street. Now, Phil Goldstone was an uncle of the Levine boys. The Levine boys' mother and Phil were brother and sister. The Levine boys' father [Abe] was connected with the movies. Of course, he was always with Phil. Phil was a producer; he was a backer of films.

GARDNER: Is he the one whom you were telling the stories about a couple weeks ago?

EPSTEIN: Yes. He lived about three houses north on the opposite side of the street, on the odd-numbered side of the street. When we first moved up there, he had three Rolls-Royces in the garage. And he had a man taking care of them; they were polished spic and span. Whenever he'd go, he'd take one of those cars. After about a year up on the hill, one day Andy was playing in the lot next door and saw Phil go by, and as children would, he threw a small

stone at him and hit the car. And Phil was very incensed over that--probably rightly. The boy shouldn't have thrown rocks. But it wasn't much of a rock, and I don't know if it even made a dent in the car particularly. But he watched over those cars. Well, they were beautiful cars. My understanding was that--well, it was a fact that Phil had money all through the Depression, that he was a broker in the sense that when a picture would get into problems, he would take it over--at a price, of course--and he would come out pretty well with it, whereas the other people who had started the picture probably would have lost what they had in it. But he was a very shrewd man. At that time he was still single. He didn't marry till late in life. He's since dead. He died about four or five years ago. He was one of our neighbors. He kept his house beautifully.

Across the street of us was the Foy family, one of Eddie Foy's sons. They were nice people. King Charney lived opposite us. King Charney was connected with the distribution of film, I think. He had the Agfa agency. Of course, when the war came along, that ruined him, because Agfa films were no longer [used]. It was a very nice, quiet neighborhood. The neighbors were always very friendly. To the immediate south of us was the Mack family, very quiet older people. And south of them was the Klein family. The Kleins were in the real estate business--Mr. [Robert] Klein was. They had three boys,

[Robert, Jr., Lloyd, and Keith], and they played with Aaron. Eugene, of course, was too young to play with them, until he grew up later. Unfortuantely, one of the Klein children (the oldest, Robert, Jr.) turned out very badly. He was always a difficult child. I remember one time, for three days in a row when I'd go down to get my car I had a flat tire. The third time, I became suspicious, and I saw the car. I looked around and I found a nail had been placed into my tire so [that] the minute I backed down it would puncture the tire. So I asked Andy--Aaron--about that. First he denied knowing anything about it, then he admitted that it was he and Bobby and the others. But Bobby was the ringleader, because he had always caused trouble around. Later, he got in bad with the navy--AWOL. He turned out very badly and I think was confined to some institution because his mind seemed to be affected. He claimed his father was not his real father and so forth.

There were a few other movie people then--of course, that was the big industry in Hollywood--who lived on the street. Sam Golter later on moved up there. Sam Golter's wife's name was Rose (she's now a widow). They had a daughter, Irma. Sam Golter was the man who was chief executive of the City of Hope when it was quite a small institution and built it into the big progressive institution it is today. He was largely responsible for broadening their philosophy and their outlook for what

they wanted to do to become a national research center. The Sinaikos, a family by the name of [Isaac (Ike) and Ruth] Sinaiko [and daughter Joan (now Mrs. Irwin Field)], later moved into the house that the Levines had lived in. They were a very fine family, now live in Beverly Hills. They were from the Middle West, and they were in soybean processing. They would press oil out of beans and out of flaxseed, and became quite wealthy. They are fine people--very charitable, very charitable. We visit them quite often. They are members of our synagogue. An extremely fine family.

GARDNER: Were you active at this point in the Jewish community?

EPSTEIN: When we first moved up there in '34, I would say no. [interruption; tape stopped] I was active in the Jewish community. Let's put it this way: I was never inactive in it. In some small way, we did things. At that time, we did things for the City of Hope--gave luncheons and dinners and contributed money. But I was not active in the sense that I became later for the United Jewish Welfare Fund. Before the Hitler business came along, the community rolled along and pretty well took care of its own, and there were various Jewish institutions--like the City of Hope, which was called the Jewish Consumptive Relief Association of Los Angeles. And we raised money. For the old home [Jewish Home for the Aged] we

raised money, and for the orphanage [Vista Del Mar] we were always involved in raising money; certain people were involved. They had this group that would come around, and they'd write a letter. We contributed money. But actively, as far as myself going out collecting money or organizing anything--no, I had not been active in that sense. Of course, I maintained a membership in the Breed Street Shul. That's the Congregation Talmud Torah. It's still situated on Breed Street, but unfortunately the membership has dropped off because the community is Mexican, some black, and some Japanese. But my father was still very active in the area. But my involvement with the United Jewish Welfare Fund didn't come till the Hitler area.

GARDNER: I see. What about as far as Temple Israel, the Hollywood temple?

ESPTEIN: Well, we became involved in that rather late. Aaron had his Bar Mitzvah through Temple Beth El, which was at that time on Wilton Place just north of Sunset. It wasn't until after we started thinking about where to send Eugene that we actively joined Temple Israel of Hollywood Boulevard--because it was a chore to drive Aaron. But most of the time--the Red Car was running in those days on Hollywood Boulevard, and he would take the Red Car and get off at Wilton and walk down. But for Eugene we thought we should be somewhere closer to home. And for Ann, she

she understood the Reform service far better than she understood the older services. So we decided to join Temple Israel. I forget the year--'44 or something like that, somewhere around '45.

We've been very active in the temple. I was on the board for a good many years. I resigned when I became seventy years old. It's got to be--not a physical chore but a mental chore. I was on the board for almost eighteen, twenty years. And you fight those problems constantly year after year after year, and I guess I became disillusioned with a number of things that had been done which turned out to be wrong, and which I suggested would be wrong, and the fact that they were very costly and later turned out to be worthless programs which involved a lot of money and out of which no one received any good. But then, that happens in all temples, and I'm sure it happens in churches and lodges and whatnot. By nature, I'm not that type of a mixer, but somehow or other when I did get into something, I worked at it. Of course, the United Jewish Welfare Fund came along. There had been a Federation Council, as everyone knows, in Los Angeles, which was active. It took care of things in normal times without too much trouble, and the community provided the money. Maybe not as much as it should. No social worker is ever satisfied with the amount of money they raise for something. But we thought we were doing pretty well. But then the time came when

we had to move thousands of people from one part of Europe to another, from one continent to another--to move them anywhere, just to get them safe. Then, of course, the big campaigns for tremendous amounts of money came along. I felt it was my obligation, the same as I feel it is every Jew's obligation--not necessarily religious Jews. I think in that sense nonreligious Jews are, in my opinion, taking a copout. I think it's just as much their problem as it is of the religious Jews. It has nothing to do with religion. When the Hitler Gestapo came along, they didn't ask, "Are you religious or not religious?" They took you if you were one-sixteenth Jew. And that goes back to an awful lot of Germans with one-sixteenth blood who had never been Jewish. And a lot of the German intelligentsia, the assimilated German Jew, had nothing to do with religions. And if they did, it was only in a nominal sense. And they were taken. So I feel that there were many people who felt, "Well, I'm not religious," and they'd take that and use it as an excuse for not giving as much as they should. They will give something. And by all means, if this is for the record, I would not say that all of the nonbelieving Jews are that way. I know many who gave considerable amounts of money. But a good many of them used that as an excuse: "Well, I'm not really that Jewish." How Jewish can you be? You're either Jewish or you're not Jewish. But you're Jewish culturally, you might say; you're Jewish by

inheritance, although you don't practice the religion. And Judaism is a race as well as a religion. So if and when--let's hope it never will, but if and when--another Hitler comes along, the same nondistinction of whether you're religious or not religious can be applied.

At any rate, seeing that I was willing to give money, I was soon asked to participate in collecting money from others, and I felt duty-bound to go as far as I possibly could. I put in tremendous numbers of hours working with committees and chairing the Hollywood division. We had meetings at our house four, five, six, eight times a year during the campaign months, and the planning months. We raised a lot of money in Hollywood in those days.

GARDNER: Who were some of the leaders of the community at that time?

EPSTEIN: Well, of course, there was Max Firestein--son-in-law of Max Factor, who was really running Max Factor. At that time he was extremely active. I saw him just the other night at a community affair. His age is beginning to show, of course, but he's still I think one of the finest men who ever lived in this community. In the local community, I'll have to refresh my memory on some of those names, because this goes back in my memory. Of course, I mentioned Phil Goldstone. He was a very charitable man. He contributed monies to various things, and he contributed fairly well

to the United Jewish Welfare Fund, and he contributed very generously to the City of Hope. Sol Mandle, who died just a little over a year ago--he and I worked together a great many years. He was not a wealthy man but a contributor according to his status. That's a goal we tried to reach with every person we contacted: Make your contribution according to your ability. He was that type of person. He wasn't a wealthy man, but he contributed well for his net worth, because he believed. Curiously enough, he was married to a non-Jew. His wife was very sympathetic to our cause and never objected to his working with us. Max Strassberg, who is gone many years, was a jeweler on the Boulevard. He was the first one in Hollywood to call on me for a contribution, because I was rather new to Hollywood. You see, I didn't move to Hollywood till '38, the forties. The demands for money were all through the thirties for the European Jews, but they didn't come till they really had to get them out of wherever they were or they would get into the camps--which of course so many did. Our rabbi, [Max] Nussbaum, was one of the last men to get out of Berlin. He tells the story. He lost everyone in his family. He himself and his wife got out.

But getting back to the local community for the period in which I was working, Charlie Rossen, who had a clothing and shoe store on Hollywood Boulevard, was active. He is

now assistant to Councilman Stevenson.* Oh, there were any number of people. My memory isn't working fast enough for your machine.

GARDNER: How about the overall Jewish community? Who were the dominant forces in those days?

EPSTEIN: Well, at that time, in the beginning era, there were--of course, the Cramer boys, Leslie and Nate, were very active. The Chudikoff family was very active. The Mitchell family--Ed Mitchell. Of course, this goes back twenty-five, twenty-six years. Now the younger generation is taking over. For instance, in the Mitchell family, Ed Mitchell, the father, was extremely active. He was head of the drive one time. And now his son Joe is extremely active, and his daughter-in-law.

GARDNER: Who was he? What was his affiliation aside from that?

EPSTEIN: The Mitchell family's Beneficial Life. And they come from Canada. The old gentleman came from Canada. He had some insurance business there, and he came to Southern California, started an insurance business. I'm trying to think, over the years, who were the chairmen of the drive. The last chairman, incidentally, is the son-in-law of the Sinaikos, Irwin Field. A very fine--he's a very young man, the youngest man that has ever been chairman. They're

*Stevenson has since died. His wife, Peggy, was elected in his place.--L.E.

over $40 million now in the 1974 campaign of city of Los Angeles raised for the United Jewish Welfare Fund. It's the largest sum they've raised.

GARDNER: What does that compare to from your time?

EPSTEIN: Well, when we raised $4-5 million in the very early days, we were doing very well. And then we went up to [$]6 million, [$]7 million. In one emergency year we raised [$]11 million, and we thought we were doing pretty good. Well, there's several things you have to consider. We could do more with $11 million in those days than you can do with $22 million today. I'm not downgrading the $40 million; it's a fantastic amount of money to raise. But there were other things you must consider relative to the amounts of money raised: number one, the Jewish community was not as large; number two, it was it was not quite as prosperous; and number three, people had to be educated to give. You'd be amazed at the number of people you would call on the first time, and they weren't accustomed to giving money. I mean, if they were, they were accustomed to giving $5 or $10 because that is all that they used to be asked for in the old days; they didn't need any more. When we came around with the Welfare Fund and started asking for $50 and $100 and $500, and some of the wealthier people into the thousands, it was a chore to educate them. I still have people I call on every year; I still call on a number of people every

year. Unfortunately, so many of my old "customers"--as I call them, or clients--are dying out or moving away or moving to the desert. Over a period of time they disperse to one thing or another. I have so-called clients who started off with $10 and are now giving thousands of dollars.

One man, a very wealthy man, lived in upper Beachwood [Drive]. I assumed that he was wealthy, and I later found out that he was. And I came to his home--a beautiful home, and a very large home--and there he was living with no children and a wife. He offered me $50. And that was during the time when $50 was--well, we needed much more from people of his standing than $50. And I refused to take it. And he became incensed at me. He said, "What right have you to refuse my contribution?" I said, "I have every right to refuse a contribution from you if I don't think you're doing what you should be doing." We had quite a hassle over it. He said, "No, you do not have that right." I said, "Well, I will guarantee you that the community will not lose anything by my refusal to take your $50. I'll put in an extra $50 for myself. But I don't want you to have the satisfaction of saying that you helped people according to your means when you are not helping people according to your means." He became very angry with me, and I became angry with him. And I told him that if he's making a contribution, he had to make it according

to his means. That's the law. If he talks Judaism to me, I'll talk Judaism. "If you make a contribution to a cause or a person, you have to make it according to your means. And I know that $50 is nowhere near your possibility." Well, you know, he called me back the next day. He called me. And he apologized to me. And he said, would I please come back to see him. And I said, "Of course I will. I don't hold any grudges." But I felt very strongly that he wasn't doing the right thing. If he wanted to do something, he wasn't doing it properly. Maybe I overreached myself, and I apologized for being that strong. So I went back to him, and he gave me $500. But the triumph of the whole thing is that he became a worker and went out soliciting other people.

GARDNER: Who was this?

EPSTEIN: Isadore Shafer. He later became a worker and went out to visit other people. And, you know, he used to tell that story about me and him having this battle. He got a great deal of satisfaction out of telling how he was impressed into the work by Louis Epstein, that "Louis turned me down." He said, "I was so ignorant of what my duty was." That's the way he expressed it. And I feel to this day it's every man's duty, whether he's Irish or whatever, if it's a racial thing and everyone is involved because of his race, his loyalty should be where his pocketbook is--or his

pocketbook should be where his loyalty is. A lot of people wave flags, but they will not give money.

I don't know if this fits into the area we're talking about. There's one incident which to me has been a very striking one. When I first became chairman of the Hollywood United Jewish Welfare Fund division, it was a more profitable division. In other words, more money was available to it then than there is now, because in those days they had the industries in Hollywood involved. Now they have taken the industries out into another area, and the people who raise money in Hollywood are not involved with the industries and don't get the larger gifts. But at that time the industries were part of the Hollywood campaign. Our budget was set up as $500,000 in the Hollywood area. Well, it was much too large a budget, and I don't think the people who set up the budget really meant that we could possibly raise it. But they set a goal which--"God help you if you raise it. Try for it, anyway." That type of thing. So I was in my little office on the mezzanine in the Pickwick, working away sorting out the cards of all my workers and assigning cards of prospects to them; and I must have been very intense about it because a salesman walked in and he almost had to shake me to get my attention. And he said to me, "Louis, you look worried." And I said, "Well, Ray, I am worried." His name is Ray Healy--very Irish, very Catholic, and quite

religious. To this day we maintain a friendship. He now lives in Connecticut, but we write to him; we send him books; he does vice versa to us. So Ray Healy, this Irish Catholic--extremely fine person--said to me, "What are you so worried about?" I said, "Ray, I've got to raise $500,000." He said, "Louis, are you out of your mind? What would you be needing $500,000 for?" "Oh," I said, "Ray, it's not for myself." And then I told him the story. That was the year that the camps were being opened, and they had to get the people out of there, move them, and find a place to move them to. So Ray very innocently said to me, "Well, Louis, you know, Jews aren't the only ones in concentration camps." I said, "Ray, I'm very much aware of that, and I'm very sympathetic to any group that's helping any people in concentration camps. And I'd be willing to put a few bucks into their pot to help them. But there's one thing that you don't realize, Ray. An Irishman in a concentration camp goes back to Ireland and he's welcome. A Pole goes back to Poland and he's welcome. An Italian goes back to Italy and he's welcome. You name any country where any person who goes back to, he is very welcome. But only one, only one people is not welcome anywhere in the world." I said, "You name me a country which is willing to take any Jews, including our own country. And what are they doing to them when they get out? A handful of them walked from the concentration

camp in Austria to Kielce in Poland--or whatever the name of the town was in Poland--and when they got there, every one of them was slaughtered by the Poles. Every one. Immediately the news got around, and all the Jews from Poland who started for Poland turned back and went back to the concentration camps. Now, Ray, you name me any country who welcomes them, or where they will even be allowed to go into." And he used an expletive, the full expletive. He said, "I'll be an SOB. I never thought about it that way." And he was very incensed at himself that he hadn't thought of it that way. "Well," I said, "Ray, you're not the only one. We have a lot of Jews who don't see it that way, and we have to try to convince them to get a few bucks out of them." So he casually left the office, and in about five minutes he came back and he dropped a check for $100 on my desk. I could have melted away and cried, I was so impressed with it. To this day, I have a feeling about it. And he contributed every year he lived out here. And whenever someone didn't call on him, he'd call me up and say, "What's the matter with you Jews? Don't you want my money?" [laughter]

But this is the type of thing we were fighting against all the time with our own people. In those days we tried to solicit non-Jews. But we later changed that, although a lot of non-Jews, especially industries, continued to contribute to the Welfare Fund. We did not solicit

non-Jews. I was not in favor of it myself. But of course some industries that had a large Jewish clientele did contribute voluntarily. A lot of the institutions around the city still do contribute.

GARDNER: Like which?

EPSTEIN: Some banks and insurance companies--not great amounts of money, but just so it could be felt that they were helping the cause. And I suppose from a business point of view, even if they're not totally altruistic from a business point of view, let's face it, there are over 500,000 Jews in this city. They can create a lot of goodwill even amongst their own people.

GARDNER: Why does your theory exist, that non-Jews should not be solicited? Why do you feel that way?

EPSTEIN: Well, the theory behind it is this: number one, I as a Jew have to go to Mr. So-and-so, a non-Jew, and ask him to help me help my people. And I don't feel that I should impose myself upon him. If he hears the story, and if it's general in a sense, and if the emergency was so great as it was at the time when the camps were first opened and in getting them out of there, those emaciated people, we couldn't handle the problem ourselves--let's put it that way. We weren't well enough organized and well enough schooled in our own community, the Jewish community, to provide it; so we had to try to get some outside help. I personally am very thankful for the outside world who

did help us. But at a later time, when we became better organized and more capable, and our community more educated in the idea of giving in proper proportion to their wealth (whether they were rich or poor, all we wanted was a proper proportion to their wealth), we felt that it was time for us to take care of our own. And we did, without really going out to solicit non-Jews. In some communities certain people would solicit certain people. Now, maybe they knew them well enough or they felt that for some particular reason they should help or whatever, but on the whole, we stopped soliciting non-Jews. I believe that was right. We were not open to criticism of, well, using a blackmail of not giving you business if you don't solicit--which we had every right to do. To this day, there are some storekeepers in our community of Hollywood that I will never buy a thing from.

GARDNER: Do you want to say which?

EPSTEIN: No, I couldn't. But there is a clothier on Hollywood Boulevard. He has no idea how much business he lost because several people stopped buying from him who could have given him a great deal of business for the type of merchandise he sells. The reason for it was this: not that he didn't want to give--we can forgive a man if he is ignorant--but he would promise us, "Come back the next day, come back the next day." And we could never get to see him. And he wasn't that busy, we happened to know. I

mean, he was not busier than I was, maybe less busy at that time because I had to run my business and for four months run a campaign in which I put in a great deal of time. And we never got a contribution from him. Every year we sent people out there. I went there. I walked seven blocks a dozen different times to keep an appointment with him which he made and he never kept. And news got around. I wouldn't go into that man's store for anything. And curiously enough, I don't say it in the sense of a just retribution, but he's a very unhappy man. [laughter] God takes care of those things, maybe.

But on the whole I think the community has taught itself to give according to its means. By no means do all Jews give according to their means, but we made tremendous progress. "According to means," I would like to give perhaps one example. In my very first year of solicitations, I was not a chairman; so I had a number of cards given to me and various addresses, and I'd walk up to the place, knock at the door. And one of the cards was of a couple [Sol and Mrs. Intro]. When I came in--a one-room apartment, sparsely furnished. They spoke with a very heavy accent. And I told them what I was there for. They said, "Well, we are just refugees ourselves. We just came. We don't have any money, really, to give away. We just came from New Orleans and have some relatives here." So I said, "Well, by no

means. I'm sorry. I don't expect you to make a contribution. I was given a card, and there's no way we know who or what you were. If you tell me this is so, just excuse me for asking you." So as I was going to leave, he said, "Wait a minute." The man said to his wife, "The man came here to ask us to help other people. We can't let him go with nothing." And he gave me $10. And I was so impressed with that, as I might have been with $1,000 from some man who might have given $10- or $20,000 living somewhere in a mansion where I went and I would get $2-, $3-, $4-, $500--which was no gift at all, really. But here was a person with $10; it probably meant less food for a week or even two weeks, because he said he just got himself a job. He later worked for B. Black [and Sons], the woolen merchant downtown.

TAPE NUMBER: VII, SIDE ONE

JUNE 17, 1974

GARDNER: What I thought we'd talk about, since we're having it [video tape] recorded for posterity, is Pickwick, the origins of Pickwick. The first question is, how did you happen to decide to move to Hollywood from the Eighth Street location?

EPSTEIN: Well, it was a practical question. I had been living in Hollywood for four years when I made the decision that it would be much nice to be closer to home. And going downtown every morning was quite a chore. It took about forty minutes in those days and forty minutes back. And the store I was in on Eighth Street was a very poorly ventilated store. And at that time, they decided to run the buses along Eighth Street. Came four-thirty to seven, and the store just became full of gas. The proprietor of the building wouldn't let us puncture the walls or the roof to put in a fan, even though we offered to do it at our own expense. I became unhappy there because of those things and others, and I felt we could do quite well in Hollywood because a lot of the Hollywood trade would come down to Eighth Street. We felt we could pick up a lot of good book trade in Hollywood, because I knew there was a lot of good book trade in Hollywood. I enumerated all the bookstores that were there at the time.

This particular store where the Pickwick is now--the original Pickwick was only twenty-six feet; now it's expanded to sixty-six feet of frontage--we saw this building. People were moving out, moving in. It was still Depression time, you know--'37, '38. So one day my wife and I, Ann and I, were walking down the Boulevard, and I said, "You know, that would make a nice place for a bookstore." And the idea sort of caught hold. So one day I became very ambitious, and I called a real estate man downtown whom I knew. And I said, "Find out about 6743, and see what can be done about it." It had become empty again. He did that, and he said, well, he could get me a lease, all right, with a reasonable rent, but it had a ninety-day clause in it. It was owned by the Bank of America, and they had acquired it as a foreclosure. And they passed a law at that time because the banks were accumulating all the property. And the law was that any bank or trust company or mortgage company must get rid of the property they had gotten by foreclosure within five years. Otherwise they would have accumulated all the real estate there was in the state. So the real estate man said, "Well, you'd have to have a ninety-day clause in it, which means that if a sale is made, the owner or buyer of that property would have the right to move you out." Well, I couldn't go for anything like that, because they may sell the building within a year and a half. I think the mortgage

had a year and a half to go, or rather, they had owned it three and a half years and it had only a year and a half to go. So I turned it down, but the real estate man apparently was quite hungry and needed business, so he said, "Why don't you buy it?" I said, "Oh, yeah? It's a great idea, but what am I going to use for money?" "Well," he said, "let me work on it." Well, he did. He found that the price of the building was $37,500 and that I would have to have $7,500 cash down payment. Beyond that, it would actually be cheaper than the rent I was willing to pay, which was a great deal. But how do you get $7,500? Well, he worked on it and worked on it with me and kept bringing it back. Finally we started scheming in our own mind: well, if we ran a sale, we might pick up $2,000, $3,000. If we took the money that was provided for this, it might be another $5-, $6-, $700. And then we figured up about $5,300. And I remember I borrowed $1,200 more from my father. And by scheming and running a sale and conserving every possible penny we could, we raised the additional $1,000.

However, this was in 1938. When we opened the Pickwick there, Edwin F. Stackhouse, who had been working for Holmes, came to work for us. He was put in charge of the Pickwick, and he was there from the day we opened for thirty-two years, from April '38 to whatever date it adds up to. However, we

did not close up [the shop on] Eighth Street downtown till 1940. We didn't want to give up the living. That was the insurance. And Pickwick frankly didn't do very well. The first year I think we had to contribute money to it, and also the first half of the second year. By the end of the second year, it pretty near broke even. But breaking even isn't making money. So we decided, well, if we combine our resources and move a lot of stock from downtown into the Pickwick, it will give that a broader stock. I will be there--there'll be two management there--and we can go out and do bigger things. Which actually happened.

So around the first of January, 1940, we had little notices printed that [the shop on] Eighth Street was going to close up in ninety days, and we were going to move the whole stock to Hollywood. So we moved a lot of stock, ran a sale downtown, cleaned out an awful lot of dregs--and we sold a lot of good books, too. I mean, you can't run a sale on just dregs. And we accumulated a couple thousand dollars in cash, which we sorely needed. And then we moved and combined the two stores, and that's how we moved Pickwick.

But the original reason for it was that I became unhappy with the Eighth Street location. Not that we weren't doing pretty well--pretty well for the times. Then the Pickwick came in. When we started working together, a good deal of the business we had downtown followed us. Ed Stackhouse had more time to do the things he wanted to do.

I did a lot of running around, picking up books, and he made a lot of outside calls. There was a conservation of energy. And I didn't have to worry about the two stores operating at the same time--although we still had the Argonaut. But as I explained to you before, the Argonaut ran with very little attention from me except in emergency times when Ben got sick.

GARDNER: How did you happen to select Stackhouse?

EPSTEIN: Well, the news got around--we spread the news that we were going to open that store--and a number of people working for other booksellers came and asked for a job. We talked to quite a few people. And Stackhouse was young; he was eager; he was capable. He'd been working for Holmes, and Holmes was not a very pleasant man to work for--he was quite unhappy. So he was one of the people we interviewed, and we selected him. He was a dedicated young man; he did fine work for us for a great many years. He did a good job. But he did a better job with me next to him. He didn't have all the resources at first that he should have had because we were in no position to provide him the resources. But when we moved the two stocks together, it became a better stock total than it was separate. And then, again, we were more assiduous in going out looking for the books, the kind of books that Hollywood wanted--which was a little bit different in a way than those things that downtown wanted.

GARDNER: Would you explain that?

EPSTEIN: Yes, yes. In those days, the Hollywood studios, all the big studios, maintained their own research libraries. Now none of them have a research library. Well, there's hardly any studios left. For instance, Paramount: we were able to find things for their research library; we got to know the librarians. We could get to them very easily. When we found something in art or unusual books they could use for scenery. . . . They used to buy a lot of things for their art department; and then also when they were working on a particular story, they would need certain kinds of things. And we had good rapport with the librarians of the studios--who, incidentally, were very capable people--most of them women, all of them women. And they would call us and tell us, "Look, we need such and such type of material. What have you got?" Of course, we'd go through all our stock and take a load of stuff down to them, and they would pick and choose what they wanted. Or they would come in. But a good many times they were just too busy to leave their work, so we would load a car full of books and take a load of stuff down to them, and they would pick and choose what they wanted. Or they would come in. But a good many times they were just too busy to leave their work, so we would load a car full of books and take it to them. It was very good business, very profitable. Our Paramount account for years ran anywhere from $600 to

$1,000 a month. That was an awful lot of business in those days. Twentieth Century-Fox, we didn't do quite as well. Paramount was our best, let's say, or biggest studio account. MGM, we sold a lot of books to. But they had some kind of a connection with a bookseller in Beverly Hills who had the inside track, you might say.

GARDNER: Who was that?

EPSTEIN: Martindale. As I say, he had the inside track. No business should give any supplier an inside track. So if we had something that we thought MGM wanted, we had to sell it to them through him--which was an unhealthy relationship. What we had to do wasn't anything that we could be attacked for or criticized for. We were selling books to So-and-so, and he in turn would sell them to MGM. But our relationship with the studios at that time was very beneficial.

Then the writers: there was a great market for books. They would do research on their own--material for stories. Movie writers--they would get a situation. They would develop the situation. Well, practically every situation has already been developed by some other author in some way--parallels, not exact, but the same thing in a different background. It happened in New York, so it happened in Hollywood. Or it happened in Dodge City, Kansas, and it could happen in Tombstone, Arizona, or in Tucson when they were filming Western epics. We had to find a lot of

research material for them.

And then the third factor were the technicians in the studios. They would need technical books on films or whatever functions they were doing. They would study their craft, amazingly. And we supplied a lot of things to them. Then people who worked in the art departments, they would form small collections of their own. And they would pick out things that they would tell the studio about, and the studio would order them. Those were the happy days in Hollywood, when the studios were spending money, and a great deal of it, and making good pictures.

And then the general public. Hollywood was a very literate community. You know, people say many bad things about Hollywood. But Hollywood has always been a literate and literary community. It was then, and it still is. Then we would get people from the areas of the universities, too. We had producers--they're a much maligned group. Many of them were excellent readers. We had one man who would read higher mathematics for pleasure. He was a studio producer, a man by the name of [J.G.] Bachman, who later retired from Paramount. The Depression got him, unfortunately. But his son, Lawrence Bachman, lives in England now. I remember him as a little boy; his father used to bring him in. He is now a writer living in England. He writes, amongst other things, mysteries. He's very popular in England.

So there is our relationship with the studios. And the actors and acresses--some of them were excellent readers. And they all, at one time or another, came through our shop. You can name any of them, and they were there.

GARDNER: Perhaps we should insert a few of those names.

EPSTEIN: Well, I mentioned Marlene Dietrich; I mentioned [Charlie] Chaplin. And even [Clark] Gable, who was not a very literate person, used to come in occasionally and buy books from us. I remember Gone with the Wind was sitting in the studio for a long, long time before it was actually shown. And he came in one day, and I think he needed an atlas. And we sold him an atlas. We got to talking. I had met him once before on that picture where he played where they had about 20,000 of our books.

GARDNER: We'll get to that story next.

EPSTEIN: Yes. I met him then, so I had a nodding acquaintance with him. His ears were very prominent. He came in, and he said, "If they don't get to that picture, I'll be an old man going around trying to help them publicize it."

GARDNER: Tell the story about the 20,000 books now, because it ties in to what you were saying about the studio rentals.

EPSTEIN: Well, one day--I think it was a Monday or Tuesday or Wednesday; I don't know--I got a call from Paramount that

they needed 20,000 books for a picture. And I said, "I can't give you 20,000 books because that's an awful lot of books. You have no idea how much 20,000 books is." "Well," he said, "we've got to have 20,000." He made it very categorical. "If you can't give us 20,000, we're going to have to look somewhere else." And I didn't want him to look somewhere else because I needed that money. I was on Eighth Street. That was before the Pickwick deal.

GARDNER: Oh, this was still on Eighth Street?

EPSTEIN: Yes. So I said, "Well, I'll guarantee you 15,000 and as many more as I can pick up without totally ruining our business"--which was foolish of me. I think even if I had to close the shop, I think I would have made more money on that deal than I would by operating the shop. At any rate, we compromised. I gave him 15,000 plus whatever else I could. I said, "Okay, when do you want them?" He said, "Tomorrow morning." I said, "Look, I can't physically get those books ready. I don't have the help; I have only one part-time assistant. I'll keep him as long as I can, but the man is only human. He can't work more than twenty-four hours a day." He said, "Well, we've got to have them." I said, "Well, you'll have to give us some help." He didn't want that. Finally we compromised: he would send one person down. So he did send one person down who was almost a helpless person. At

any rate, I worked, and we worked together, and we worked--my assistant and he--and we got all those books stacked up as close to the door as possible, and the front of the store was pretty much blocked off. And I went home around two o'clock, and at five o'clock or six o'clock I was back in the shop because they said they would be there at nine o'clock. I wanted to get as much more ready as I possibly could, stack them up for them. Well, nine o'clock came, and the studio truck was not there yet. Ten o'clock came, and they were not there yet. So just before eleven o'clock I called them. I said, "Where is your truck? You said you'd be here at nine o'clock. I'm blocked up; I can't let anybody in or out; I can't do business. What's happening?" He said, "Oh, we don't need those till Tuesday of the following week." I said, "Oh, no, mister, you've got to get these out of here. I can't put these all back on the shelf and then put them back Tuesday." Well, he was reluctant to do that, but he could see the justice of my plea. I said, "You've got space there. I don't have space." So within an hour he had three great big ten-ton trucks there. Well, he didn't need three of them. One of them would have been sufficient. A ten-ton truck will hold a hell of a lot of books. They took them away, and they put them up. Then we went back into business. [tape interrupted]

GARDNER: You had told me a story during our first preliminary

about Marlene Dietrich and her presence in your store.

EPSTEIN: Marlene, as I mentioned, was to me a very fine person, I thought. A person that much in the public life has a tendency to become aloof and fearful of the public itself. How she acted in other places I wouldn't know. But when she came to Pickwick, which was quite often when she lived at the Beverly Hills Hotel--sometimes twice a week and maybe sometimes more often--she loved to browse through the shop. She bought quite a few books, and her reading habits were, oh, I would say she read from good to fine, rather than from good to medium, rating on a literary scale. And she was always interested in other people's reading. She always watched what the other people bought. And she loved to browse through the shelves. And when she came, of course, Marlene was noted for wearing slacks in the days when women didn't wear slacks. And she would come in with her daughter and the daughter's au pair or whatever you might call her. This woman's name was Viola Rubber, and she later became an agent. Her daughter [Marie] was quite small. What was the daughter's name? I forget. My wife would remember. And Marlene would browse around. The youngster would be, maybe, with the children's books with Miss Rubber watching her. And one evening as Marlene was looking through the shelves in the fiction department, which was on the east side of the store with a counter in between that and the balance of the store--and that was

before the Pickwick was as large as it is; it was only twenty-six feet wide--a woman customer looking at fiction mistook Marlene as one of the people who worked there, a clerk, perhaps. So she asked Marlene where is a certain book she was looking for. Marlene, without batting an eye, or making any remarks at all, said, "I'll find it for you." And she went and got the lady her book. She handed it to her, and the lady went over to the cash counter and paid for it. One of the clerks who had observed all this--I was in the shop at the time and I watched it, too--remarked to the lady, "You know, you had one of the highest-priced book clerks in the world, probably the highest-priced book clerk in the world, waiting on you." She said, "What do you mean?" The woman was puzzled by the remark. He said, "Don't you know who that was who waited on you?" She said, "No. I thought it was someone who worked here." Well, we told her that it was Marlene Dietrich. Well, the woman was so excited that she bought her book, paid for it, and rushed back to Marlene to have Marlene autograph her book to her. Marlene very kindly, very nicely did put an inscription in it. The woman wanted her to put down, "Sold to me by Marlene Dietrich at the Pickwick Bookshop," at a certain time. This type of incident of a noted person being mistaken for a clerk has happened many times. Famous writers would come and be looking around and would be approached.

GARDNER: For example?

EPSTEIN: Well, a man at the time, a chap by the name of Scott. He looked like a book clerk. He was a writer. At that time he was one of the top writers in the studios. I think he was later forced out of the business by the blacklist.

GARDNER: Adrian Scott.

EPSTEIN: Right. He was later forced out of the business, I think, by the blacklist, I regret to say, which was a sad thing for a lot of the people whom I knew. I knew the whole [Hollywood] Ten. They had some things to be criticized for, I'm sure. They did some things that certainly I didn't approve of, but to blacklist them in that way I think is totally unjust. They might have avoided the problem in some other way. At any rate, to get back to your story, he looked like a book clerk. He was always being mistaken.

There was a lot of fun in that shop. That's the thing, I think, that makes bookshops fun--that the real book customer, the constant book customer, becomes part of your shop. He really does. He begins to fit into your whole atmosphere. And that, I imagine, helped make Pickwick--not that people consciously knew they were going to meet celebrities there. We never advertised anything like that. We never tried to build our business on a personality basis. Our business was built on the fact that we had the books

that people wanted, and they came. They chose to come. They weren't asked by somebody to come. We were very proud of that fact. As you know, the Beachcomber's right around the corner from us, and the Beachcomber then, I think, was a much more popular place for the movie colony than it is today. And then a block up was Musso and Frank, that Hollywood restaurant. It's been there since 1919. It was a place to go, and the movie people went there. Between the Beachcomber and Musso-Frank and the Pickwick, sort of a rapport had been built around it. I think I mentioned to you what Chaplin said. One of the columnists wrote this--this is aside from what Chaplin said. One of the columnists once wrote later on, he said, "The only thing left of Hollywood on Hollywood Boulevard is the Beachcomber, Musso-Frank, and the Pickwick Bookshop." Well, Chaplin, in one of his books, mentioned pretty much the same thing--that the Pickwick Bookshop was one of the attractions. As a matter of fact, one of his friends who had visited him came back and told us about having this visit with him; and he particularly asked, "Is the Pickwick Bookshop still there?" He spent a lot of time at our store.

GARDNER: What were his reading habits?

EPSTEIN: Moderate, middling. He liked illustrated books--not modern illustrations, Gustave Doré and the early illustrators of the mid-eighteenth century. And he would buy

illustrated books. He would buy current material, too, from time to time, but not so much. His wife, Oona, Eugene O'Neill's daughter, was something else again. She was a very literary reader. She was a very fine person. There's an incident where Oona came in around Christmas to do her Christmas shopping. She was giving a lot of books, and she picked up a large stack of books. She had them at the counter, and Mrs. Epstein was waiting on her. And another woman came rushing in and wanted to interfere, wanted to be waited on right then and there and so forth. My wife tried to explain to here that "this lady"--without mentioning Mrs. Chaplin--that "this lady was here ahead of you." Well, the woman started to make a row about it, so Oona said, "Look, wait on her. I'll wait." We thought that was a very thoughtful thing on her part to do. Instead of becoming indignant herself, she avoided an embarrassing situation with someone else. And she was that way all the way. She would ask for something, she would say please, and [she would] behave like a lady throughout. We were very fond of her. And she liked our shop and told us so.

A very interesting thing, if I may bring it in at this time: This is maybe some years after. It doesn't fit in the context of the time I'm talking about. A lot of the TV writers--they came in afterwards, so it would be a later period--were moved back and forth from Hollywood

to New York. And one youngster, one young lady with whom Aaron went to school at Hollywood High, later married one of the TV writers, and she had to move to New York with her husband. When she came back for a visit, she stopped in at the store, and we knew her. And she was telling us about the school of writers, a group of writers in New York that had all been from Hollywood now living there, and most of them were quite unhappy. And they measured New York as how many miles from the Pickwick. [laughter] They were always wanting to know, asking about the Pickwick. And, curiously, many of them would send us orders for books when they had plenty of bookstores in New York. We had several regular charge accounts who bought books from us by mail, and sometimes by telephone, rather than buy them in New York. Maybe the New York stores didn't have them on the shelf at the time. You know that we had probably the largest selection of titles of any store in the United States.

GARDNER: Is that so?

EPSTEIN: Oh, yes. That's what made Pickwick. I mean, we tried to give our people that great variety. The salesmen had to give me an excuse for not buying a book. They'd run through a catalog and they would say, "Louis, I don't think you need this." I'd say, "Why do you say I don't need that?" And I would look through the catalog, and if I thought there was one person in Hollywood who might buy it, I stocked that

book. We took a great many losses on some books, but, by the same token, if they found a book they couldn't find anywhere else, we made a friend for the bookstore for life. And we worked at it.

GARDNER: Was Pickwick strictly used books when you first opened it up?

EPSTEIN: When we first opened, it was strictly used books, because that was the only business we knew; and it was our idea to have a large used-book store in Hollywood, which they didn't have on Hollywood Boulevard at that time: number one, because we felt it would fill a need for used books; and secondly, because there were already a lot of new-book stores there. It's a business we didn't know. But from the time we opened our doors, people started asking for new books. Well, we gradually added one of this or two of that of the later books. But it wasn't until the war that we really definitely decided we were going into the new-book business. We did it as rapidly as we could, considering the capital we had and space. To put a new-book stock into a store that was already crowded with old books took some doing. But we managed to do it somehow, and afterward, of course, we opened the second floor and the mezzanine, which we hadn't used in the old-book days.

GARDNER: How did that change your business problems? What new problems came on as a result of handling new books?

EPSTEIN: WEll, I had to learn a different kind of buying entirely, buying for--well, at that time there were maybe 20,000 new books a year being issued, and I had to choose out of those, to pick what I thought Hollywood would need. But I think our used-book background gave us a whole different picture of the new-book business, unlike that of someone who'd been in new books only all his book experience. We could recognize a book's worth, I think, perhaps better on an overall basis than maybe a person whose total background was new books, because in the old books, you are constantly dealing with the whole of the world's literature. Not that the new-book business is not concerned with it, but we had to know the books of yesterday, ten years from yesterday, fifty years preceding yesterday, or back to the beginning of book publishing. Not that anyone could ever accumulate all that knowledge. But by that time I'd been in business twenty-some-odd years, in the old-book business, and if you work at it, you accumulate a lot of knowledge about an awful lot of books. And it helped me a great deal with the studios in research. I was able to buy new books from that perspective to put into our stock because I felt this is the kind of book which relates to that kind of book which I'd had, the studios were buying old copies of or old books about; and I could relate it to the present, perhaps, more than had I not had that experience. To this day, I've always said that the best training for a new-book seller would be two years or three

years in the old-book business, because he'd get a much broader scope of the total book world, certain things that a new-book seller never sees or hears of, really. You can be very erudite and know a great many subjects, but most booksellers--let's put it that way--may be erudite, but they don't know the book world as it really is, the total book world of rare books, old books, medium old books, and so forth. I think my old-book experience helped me a great deal, because in the old-book business, you search out any good book on any subject, and you try to get it into your stock. And I followed that principle when I started buying new books. If a salesman had a book on a subject, although the subject wasn't popular, if it was a good book, I bought it, whereas it might be the only copy he sold in Southern California, which a lot of the salesmen would tell me. Well, they didn't even try to sell certain books, because they felt the new-book sellers wouldn't have any need for them. And I proved them wrong many times.

GARDNER: When you switched over to new books, did you continue to devote as much attention to the old books?

EPSTEIN: Well, obviously, I couldn't. Because I was the buyer, the seller, the executive of the business. That was before Aaron came into the business. No, I constantly turned more and more of it over to Stackhouse. And I concentrated more and more on the new books. But I still knew what was going on in the old books, and every lot that came in I took

a glance at it to see what nice things there were, special things there were. And I kept up with the literature of old books--bibliographies and anything unusual that was happening in the old-book business, the auction records, the auction catalogs. I loved the business. To this day, I think there's more fun in old books than new books.

GARDNER: And I notice you've lost none of your interest and enthusiasm.

EPSTEIN: If you look around the house, you might gather that. [laughter]

GARDNER: How did you come to the name "Pickwick"?

EPSTEIN: We decided that if we were going to have a shop in Hollywood and a shop downtown--at first we thought we might be running both--that it might be confusing and it might cause us a great deal of work. People would say, "Well, get it from the other shop," or "Get it from this shop," and a lot of transferring of phone calls back and forth--which I anticipated might happen because word got around that we owned both of them. We thought this might be a good time for a change. So we started asking the family and friends who came into the shop. And amongst other names that were suggested--hundreds of them--was the name "Pickwick." And we put it aside in the back of the mind and kept coming back to it. And every time we'd go through the names, "Pickwick" would always come back. And it got so easy to say. And it had a nice literary

connotation, easy to remember, easy to spell or misspell. Finally we decided that would be a good name, and we chose that. Now, there were a couple of Pickwicks over the country, and later on they caused us a little bit of distress because one of them never paid their bills--some shop near New York City. We were always getting threatening letters that if we didn't pay our bill, they wouldn't send us any more books. But fortunately, or unfortunately, they went bankrupt, and Pickwick's name was almost exclusive all over the country. I'm very happy to say it was a name that was held in high esteem.

GARDNER: What were some of the other names that were suggested?

EPSTEIN: Oh, Vanity Fair. We tried to pick a literary name or the Hollywood this or California that. But we always kept edging back towards Pickwick. We thought of hundreds of different kinds of names--names of flowers and people, the Benjamin Franklin Bookstore, and things like that. I guess the only name we didn't consider was our rabbi's name.

GARDNER: To get back to some of your famous customers, just briefly, one person whose name popped up in a couple of articles that I read about you was Charles Laughton.

EPSTEIN: Well, Charles Laughton was, of course, a very nice person. Incidentally, he later moved up to Curson,

where we lived, and bought a big house. Elsa Lanchester, his wife, still lives there. A nice big house. We got acquainted casually. As I mentioned, I never pushed myself forward with famous people. I wasn't forward in that way with anyone. It wasn't in my nature. But over the years, from constant contact--once when he called up and wanted a book in a hurry, it was the first time that I told him that he lived on our street. I say, "he lived on our street" because I was there before he was. [laughter] And I said, "I'll drop it off on my way up." Well, he was very surprised that I lived there and very happy to hear it. So from there on, I would drop off books two or three times a week. He was a great reader, a very literary guy.

In addition to that, he had as one of his literary secretaries a young man by the name of Alfred Brush. Alfred Brush was a frustrated poet. Maybe I shouldn't use that word, because he had written a couple of books of poetry which were published by vanity publishing houses. I think I have one or two of his books which he autographed to me. Alfred was constantly in our shop. He would find books, and he would suggest them to Charles Laughton. And Laughton would call up, or Brush had the authority to buy books for Laughton and sign for them and take them with no questions asked. If he said, "Charge these to Mr. Laughton," they were charged to Mr. Laughton.

So I would deliver a lot of books to Mr. Laughton. Every time, he invited me in to have a drink. Once or twice I took advantage of his hospitality, but I was always in a hurry to get home because my dinner was waiting for me and my family was waiting. And I told him, I explained to him, "I can't stop because I'm late already." He understood.

He was a very pleasant guy to do business with. When he walked in the store, he wasn't Charlie Laughton of the stage. He was a customer who was looking for books, and we tried to treat him that way, because I can imagine he wanted to get away from his profession. It's a relaxation to browse amongst books, and he didn't want to be constantly reminded and asked about it. And we tried to keep autograph seekers away from the people who came into our shop. We thought it was unfair. And the instructions to my people were always, "I don't care who he is or who they are, you treat them like you would treat anyone else." And I think they appreciated that on the whole.

It's only one man whom I once stopped doing business with, a very famous actor. I told him I would just as soon not do business with him because he expected to be treated as a movie star and I don't treat people as movie stars. We treat them with respect. But he took advantage of his position, and I called it to his attention. He had us order some books from England--special order, books that

we had no use for for our own people, for our own stock--and when they came a few weeks later, he said he no longer needed them. "Well," I said, "that's too bad. I'm sorry to hear that. But I think you're obliged to take them. You had me order them, and I think you're obliged to take them." Well, he didn't feel that he was. I said, "Well, we've already charged them to your account, and we will not take them back." His manager was with him. He said, "Oh, you can't do that to Mr. So-and-so." I said, "Look. Mr. So-and-so is just Mr. So-and-so to me. He ordered these books, and I would expect any customer to take care of them. He can afford to pay for them. He can more afford to pay for them and not use [them] than I can afford to pay for them and not use them. It's his obligation to take them." Well, he eventually paid for them, after our accounting department went after his manager. But he was one of the very few who ever put us on the spot like that. I can say truthfully for all the movie people that we had as customers that they treated us certainly as people should be treated, and we tried to treat them with proper respect. A few of them, like other people, had trouble paying their accounts from time to time, but on the whole, contrary to the stories that go around, I don't think, percentagewise, we lost any more with our movie-associated people than we did with the ordinary run of our charge customers. I think on the whole we had nice dealings with them.

GARDNER: Who was this Mr. So-and-so?

EPSTEIN: That's off the record.

GARDNER: Okay. You've spoken several times of the émigré community, the German refugees and so on.

EPSTEIN: That was an experience--it's probably been touched on. I've seen little bits and pieces about that community in various magazine articles, occasionally in a book or an essay or a criticism of a book, a review of a book. There was a whole group of émigrés from almost any country you can name, predominantly Jewish--there were a few political non-Jewish émigrés--who settled in Hollywood. They were obviously writers, for the most part, and musicians, and they tried to create a new life for themselves here. Being people who loved books, they would come to the Pickwick, and they were learning the language. A number of them could speak English as foreigners. Their speech was thoroughly Germanic--I can recognize Germanic--and there were Spaniards, and there were many British who came to live here, as you well know, simply to get away from the war and its effects. (I don't know what they were running away from except the atmosphere of war. What their motivation was is not for me to say.) But there was this émigré colony of every language you could think of, and they were all customers of the Pickwick. And very often they would meet at the Pickwick; they would run into each other, having not seen each other for many, many years. And the relationship they

had had apparently was very close from the way they greeted each other. They threw their arms around each other, so happy to see each other. I guess in many cases they didn't know whether that person was even alive, either one, because there wasn't that total communication. Even if they had wanted to write to each other, they wouldn't know where they were. Some very poignant situations occurred there. If I were able to write and had picked them up at the time, it would have made a good story. [Arnold] Zweig, [Thomas] Mann, [Alma] Mahler--names of that sort. And [Franz] Werfel. You can go up and down the line. A lot of musicians--musicians' names I don't know so well, but I know there were a lot of them there. I think I mentioned the story of that one musician. I was waiting on a man in the back of the store. He was a Frenchman. He had been in the shop quite a number of times, and we got on a nice "hello" basis where he would ask me for things and I'd try to find them. We were somewhere in the back of the shop, which at that time had old books.

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EPSTEIN: As I was talking to him, we were standing so that we could both see the front of the store. And a person walked in, and I could watch his eyes. His eyes almost bulged. I could see he became very excited. And he said, "Excuse me," and he ran to this man. He threw his arms around him, kissed him, and the man in turn did the same thing. (He was a much older man. The one I was speaking to was a rather younger man.) There was this beautiful exchange of greetings and all that. Then he later told me that the older man was a Greek. But he had a an office in Paris; he later lived in Paris. This man supplied all the musical talent and other types of talent for the better nightclubs all over Europe, and this man had given the younger man his first start as a musician in an orchestra that played in these places. He regarded him as almost a second father. He later told me this older man was a very fine person; he took care of everybody. When they got into trouble, he took care of them and supported them till they got their next job. The older man's name was Varousis. He and I conversed many times. Yes, he had taken care of a lot of the people who were here now. When things got bad he said he had to feed them, and things went bad for him, too. He said he fed

them spaghetti when he could afford nothing else.

It was that type of thing that was happening all the time. Women would find each other. It was almost like a way station, where if you stand long enough, you're going to meet everybody. And that was the type of thing that transpired here. [tape interruption]

GARDNER: Since we're talking about the émigré community, I was wondering if you could tell the tape a story that you told me during our preliminary interview about Lion Feuchtwanger.

EPSTEIN: Poor Mr. Feuchtwanger. He was a very fine gentleman, and he stood about this high. A very, very small voice. And you had to lean down to him to hear him. But he was a great scholar, and I respected him and his scholarship very much. This was during the war or shortly after--probably during. The clerks we had were probably no better than the clerks at the Pickwick today. (You can interpret that any way you wish.) At any rate, we had one chap who had come to ask me for a job. He stood about six feet four or five. Well, you know how tall Aaron is. About two or three inches taller than Aaron, which would be around six foot five. A very nice boy, but he didn't know a thing about books, and when he came to ask for a job, I said, "Well, what do you know about books?" He said, "Not much, but I can learn"--which I thought was a very good remark.

And we needed someone, so we thought he could at least wait on trade and take money, which was a great thing in itself in those days. Help was very hard to find. (Eldred Meyer is his name. I don't think he would mind my telling this story, because we've laughed over it many times since.) Mr. Feuchtwanger came in, and he was approached by Eldred Meyer. Usually Mr. Feuchtwanger looked for me, and we got along very nicely. He would tell me what he wanted. So by way of introduction, this nice old man says to Eldred, "I am Mr. Feuchtwanger." And he didn't hear exactly what he said. The sounds were foreign to him. And he spoke with a great deal of an accent. So he said, "I beg pardon?" So Mr. Feuchtwanger repeated that. He said, "I am Mr. Feuchtwanger." So Eldred was totally puzzled; he didn't know exactly what he was talking about. So Feuchtwanger repeated the same thing over again, and Eldred replied finally in desperation, "I'm sorry, we don't have any more of that." [laughter] That story got around, and poor Mr. Feuchtwanger finally asked somebody where I was. And wherever I happened to be they called me, and they told me what had happened before. Eldred himself told me. [laughter] And we think that's one of the funnier stories about the shop at the time.

GARDNER: Was Feuchtwanger one of your regular customers?

EPSTEIN: Oh, by all means. He had us search out books for him when he was writing on a subject. He would give us a

list of books about the subject. He would usually prepare a bibliography of things he was looking for. He may have used the UCLA library. He had a very fine library, a very fine one. And I think Mrs. Feuchtwanger gave it to USC, if I'm not mistaken.

GARDNER: Oh, what a shame.

EPSTEIN: She had to do something with it.

GARDNER: She could have given it to UCLA.

EPSTEIN: Well. . . . UCLA may have had. . . . The library that has more books sometimes needs them less than the library that has fewer books. But whatever arrangements they may have made--I think they gave him a special room. They gave him a special name for his library. He had a great deal of historical material, some of it very rare.

GARDNER: You mentioned [Bertolt] Brecht was also one of your customers.

EPSTEIN: Well, Brecht--we didn't know him well. He wasn't here long. But while he was here, he used to drop in. And curiously, when he left--before he left--I was called in to buy the few books he had left. And I remember going up to some small house above Sunset Boulevard. I don't know now exactly what street it was on, but he had a very small apartment there, and apparently he was very poor. And he sold me some of his books. As a stupid thing, I didn't keep them. A number of them had his name in it with notations and whatnot, which would be invaluable today. But I

didn't know him very well except that he was and I did have his books.

GARDNER: Were there any of the others whom you did know well? You mentioned Stravinsky was one of your customers?

EPSTEIN: Stravinsky, Igor and Vera--they used to come in very often. We were acquainted, but of course, I'm not in the least bit musical. I knew nothing about his music. But they bought general books. They were both excellent readers, and we sold them books for a good many years. Very pleasant people--Vera was a sweet person, very pleasant to deal with. There, again, the true artist never was demanding of any special services. Sometimes if they needed something in a hurry, why, I could understand that they had to have it for a special reason, we made every effort to get it to them in a hurry. We would make a personal delivery if necessary. Very often we would use Red Arrow Service. Some of them would want Red Arrow Service, and we'd always charge them for that. They were very nice. And then, as I said, [Robert] Craft came into the picture, and he, too, was a customer for a long time. Then, of course, they lived in Europe for so much of the time. They would go away for months at a time, even when they were living here. But then they changed their home altogether.

GARDNER: Now, just before we started this tape, you started to tell a story about Anais Nin.

EPSTEIN: Anais Nin? Well, the story has an unpleasant incident in it, but I don't think it should be off the record, necessarily. It just only shows lack of judgment on her part. That was before she became very famous and very popular. She had published a number of books herself or had other publishers publish here and also in England. We used to stock her books. They weren't great sellers, but we would sell a few and made a real effort to keep them in stock. Well, one day--well, to go back a little bit. She was a very forward person, a very pressing person. She would demand that we keep her books in the window. She would make friends with the clerks to induce them to put the books in the window. Which was all right--I mean, everyone wants to push their merchandise. But she was extremely aggressive that way.

One day, out of the blue, we get quite a large package from a publisher in England. We looked at it; they called my attention to it because in those days we had to pay duty. So if the duty amounted to anything over several dollars, they would call me in and verify whether they should accept it or not. They did, and I looked the package over, and I said, "I didn't order any books from that firm." Well, we decided to take it anyway. We opened the package, and there was about ten to fifteen copies of almost every one of Anais Nin's books that that British publisher had. "Who ordered these?" I checked with the clerk who was friendly

with her. "Did you give her. . . ." "No," he said, "I wouldn't think of giving orders for books to a British publisher, or any orders. You know that, Mr. E." I said, "Well, I realize that, but how in the world did they get here?" So I wrote to the British publisher and told them that we had not ordered these books and that we were going to send them back unless he had some address in the United States where he wanted me to send them rather than send them back to him in England. So he wrote back and said, "Oh, yes, they were ordered. They were ordered by Miss Nin." I immediately wrote back to them and said, "Miss Nin is not our employee. I never gave her any orders to order any books from you. She did not tell us she was going to order any books or discuss it with us in any which way. I'm sending them back immediately." And he apparently wrote to her. She was back in Los Angeles by that time. [phone rings; tape stopped] By that time, she apparently had heard from the publisher. No, she had apparently not yet come back to Los Angeles, but she wrote me a letter--I forget where she was--accusing me of all sorts of things, of always having a policy of restraining the sale of her books, which was totally ridiculous. That's one area in which we never played favorites. Joe Doakes was as good to me as Dreiser. If it was a good book, I would represent it. And I wrote back to her, explaining to her that I think she was totally unfair and totally wrong: that we'd always

sold her books, I intended to sell her books, and we do not censor anyone's writing or refuse to sell anyone's book if it's salable. Our total position was that we sell books because they sell, and if we can't sell them, we can't buy them.

Well, she was very upset. She finally came to town, and when she came to town, she called me on the telephone. And I had to explain over and over again that I run the Pickwick Bookshop, that I decide what quantities of books to buy--nobody orders books for me--that she had absolutely no business ordering those books without at least discussing them with me. Under the circumstances, I might have said, "Okay, send me two or three copies"--or whatever. We could have absorbed that. But to send the quantities. . . . I wouldn't let anyone in the world do it. She just could not understand that. She accused me--she has a violent temper--of everything under the sun, being unfair to her. And I just couldn't convince her that she was the one who was totally wrong, taking the liberty of ordering all those books. From there on we were not friends. Curiously enough, some time later, my son met her--my astronomer son [Eugene], not Aaron--and they hit it off pretty well. I said, "Well, fine, but don't ever tell her who your father is." [laughter]

[tape stopped]

GARDNER: Aaron mentioned the story about Scott Fitzgerald coming in to the store.

EPSTEIN: I don't have any specific story about Scott Fitzgerald except that when he lived here he was a constant customer of the shop. A very pleasant man to do business with. As it happened, Mrs. Epstein waited on him a number of times, and she really liked him, because he was such a gentleman. He was. He wouldn't talk much. He was usually accompanied by another person, a man, who almost did the talking for him. Sheilah Graham--whether they ever came in together or not, I don't know; they probably did. He lived at the Garden of Allah. Every so often he'd call for a book, and someone would deliver it to him on the way home. I know I did once. But to us he was not a talkative person at all. He was very polite with what he wanted. At that time, the old books were upstairs; he loved to go upstairs and browse through the old books. Of course, he scanned the new books, too, because he was interested in what was going on in the literary world. He never appeared to be a very happy person. He was almost sad-looking. He didn't appear to have as much life to him as I read about him in the press, or in the books I read about him, in some of his books. But I suppose he'd gone through so much by that time, and it wasn't too long before his death. He died during the time he used to visit us. But I don't know of any incidents or stories about him that would be material. As a matter of fact, we treated him as a person who wanted to buy books and no other way. No one, unless they knew him,

would ever recognize him from the pictures you see of him in his youth. There was hardly any recognizability--at least, I wouldn't be able to recognize Scott Fitzgerald as shown in his heyday of writing.

GARDNER: What about Faulkner during the time that he was out here?

EPSTEIN: Faulkner used to come in fairly regularly. He lived around the corner on Highland Avenue, and he used to eat his meals at Musso's. So he would walk by the store, and he would stop in two, three times a week. He would buy books for himself, sometimes old books, oh, every other week or so he would pick out two, three books to send to his daughter at Oxford, Mississippi. I think I mentioned he was very particular to be sure that I spelled out Mississippi, because, he said, there were Oxfords in every state in the union and if you didn't spell out "Mississippi," it was liable to go to any one of the other forty-seven states--at that time. He was known to be a person who didn't indulge too much in conversation, which was definitely true. But he was polite. He knew his books, though. Start mentioning books for children, he knew every one of them. We would order books for him, sometimes for the thing he was working on in the studio or something he wanted to read for himself that we didn't have, we would get for him. He invariably came in alone. As is well known, he didn't have too many friends. He didn't make

friends very easily. He lived sort of a lonely life. He did not like it here.

GARDNER: And his work reflected it. Any others, among the great literary lights? I know they're too numerous.

EPSTEIN: Theodore Dreiser was a constant customer.

GARDNER: Would you like to talk about him for a little while?

EPSTEIN: He was a big man. He always had a stern look on his face--I wouldn't say angry look, but more or less of a stern character. Not easily approachable. We never tried to approach any of our people in that respect. We were merchants to them, and if they wanted to talk, we listened. If they didn't want to talk, we made no effort to get them to talk, because there was no point to our discussing his literary values with him. And he used to come in with a woman friend. We later on bought a lot of his books from this lady, some of which were autographed by him, inscribed by him, and should have been part of a good collection, and eventually were sold to people who were collecting Dreiser. We had no specific, unusual incidents that I could tell you about him except his appearance and his gruff would almost scare some of the more timid people in the shop.

Aldous Huxley was a constant customer of ours.

GARDNER: You were going to talk about him before.

EPSTEIN: Aldous Huxley was a customer of ours since the very early days--I should say the later days on Eighth Street.

I'm referring to how long ago since Eighth Street, which was before '38. And I remember the first time he came into the shop. Strangely, what he asked me for was a Bible with pretty good type, a secondhand Bible with pretty good type. On Eighth Street we had nothing but secondhand books. Who brought him in, I don't recollect--whether he came in by himself or if he was with somebody. But he was a constant buyer of books. And his eyesight, as you know--he was almost blind. Later on, he would wear glasses, and on top of the glasses he would still need a glass. But sometimes he would read without a glass. And through those very thick lenses, he would read almost with one eye. His head would be thrown to the right side, I think, and he would have the book almost to his face. It was very sad to look at. But he was a very fine person, just a total first-class person. He talked, and he expressed himself if he liked the book; or he'd pick up a book and you were around, he'd make some remark about it; and he knew the author and he'd make some personal remark about the author. He preferred to say good things about an author, that this man knew what he was talking about and this man might have done better. He was extremely widely read. With all the handicap he had in reading, he read an amazing number of books. And he retained everything he saw. Later on we moved to Hollywood, and of course he lived in Hollywood. He lived up the Beachwood

area. Later on his house was totally destroyed--and with everything in it! They had a fire up there eight or ten years ago. So many houses were destroyed up there, his amongst them. He came in one day shortly after the fire, and of course we commiserated with him. He said, "Oh, it's a very strange feeling, to lose every possession that you have. You don't realize how many necessary possessions that you pay no mind to, don't think of from day to day." He said, "For instance, what do you do if you wake up in the morning and there isn't another pair of socks, or your toothbrush is gone, or your favorite pair of shoes is gone, or <u>any</u> pair of shoes is gone?"

He always expressed himself clearly and beautifully. It was a great pleasure to talk to him. He and I got along very well. We always made it a point to find a few minutes to talk. I made it a point if he wanted to talk to take advantage of the opportunity. He was a very worried man in the sense that he had a total worldwide feeling for people. You understand what I'm driving at. He was fearful that the world was really going to be exterminated. And of course there are a lot of people who are following his thinking today. And he was very widely knowledgeable about the conditions in all parts of the world, parts of the world that the normal person never mentions or is not even aware of--the African countries, the poor Asiatic countries. And he'd say, "Well, what's going to happen to all these people?

One of these days they're going to want what they're entitled to." And it's happening. Later on, he got into the metaphysical thing. In my mind--now, this is an unexpert's view--I thought that his mind was deteriorating. He tried these hallucinogenic drugs. His efforts were very sincere, a search for knowledge. He had an insatiable thirst for knowledge, knowledge per se. And he would try things that seemed reasonable to him. But I think from there on he deteriorated, rapidly. His writing--even the critics say it was not of the quality that it had been before, that he divorced himself from certain types of interests that he had and went too deeply into these extrasensual perceptions. That was only one of his many things that he delved in, besides the drug scene that he tried. If he wanted to know something, he did it. His second wife, she helped him a great deal, but, unfortunately, he died and that was that. But I will say, he was a very fine person.

He had a son by the name of Matthew who used to live here at one time. And he used to visit with me on occasion. He later went to work for the World Health Organization. I lost track of him. Where he is now, I have no idea. But being a Huxley, he's somewhere connected with knowledge, and with the search for knowledge, and research. That's a fantastically famous family. On almost every side of the family, they branch into the scientists, the authors,

and they're so interconnected in the British literary and scientific scene. You know, his brother is Julian Huxley, who's a very famous scientist, world-renowned researcher. He was more a biologist. I've often wondered where Matthew is. I would love to meet up with him and sit down and talk for a while.

[Christopher] Isherwood was a frequent customer of our shop. We go all the way up and down the line. Some of them I formed an acquaintance with. Ray Bradbury, of course, he's an inveterate book browser, an extremely bright person, extremely bright; and he's a great friend of the book per se, of knowledge per se. I've had him come to autograph some of his books, and he'll always very willingly do that. He once described the Pickwick--I don't know, I think I mentioned it to you before--in one of his articles, "How to Spend an Evening in Los Angeles," how few places anyone can go to without great expense, to go around, look, see, of an evening. And one of the places that he mentioned you could have a great deal of fun is the Pickwick. And he said you go in there on a Friday night, and it's "wall-to-wall people, floor-to-ceiling books." [laughter] He mentioned that in one of the articles. A very fine guy. I suppose, if I some day sat down and made a bibliography of all the authors. . . . I should remember, but in a conversation like this I can't begin to remember the total number.

GARDNER: I just wondered, the ones who stood out in your mind. What about somebody like Raymond Chandler, who was so closely identified with Los Angeles?

EPSTEIN: Raymond Chandler, I never knew personally. He definitely did come in, but he was in and out and I never got to know him. He was a good friend of Stanley Rose's.

GARDNER: He was on that side of the street.

EPSTEIN: No, it wasn't a matter of Stanley Rose. We got quite a few of his customers. There are a great many technicians of the motion picture industry who are good customers of ours, people who have actually manufactured the picture, if you understand what I mean--the directors, assistant directors, cameramen. They were constant buyers of books. Madison Lacey, for instance, was a photographer for the movies for a great many years, and one of the experts. He's now retired. He was a great customer of ours, friend of the shop. He became a very good friend of Stackhouse. I think to this day they have lunch every week. My mind, unfortunately, doesn't work fast enough that I can name them offhand. They all come back to me over a period of time.

GARDNER: Was Pickwick ever used in a work of fiction?

EPSTEIN: It has been mentioned in quite a number of books. My wife picked up a book here not so long ago which was written about twenty years ago, I think one of the mystery stories. And he used Pickwick quite a bit as a background.

We didn't know it at the time. It shows how this man rushed to his favorite bookstore, and he described where it was. Of course, he didn't name Pickwick, but we knew immediately what was happening. He described what was happening in the store, and we could recognize what he was talking about. Yes, very often. And there have been shots of the Pickwick for the studios, who used it from time to time for a shot of books. And the publicity men used to like to bring their stars and starlets in and take pictures at the Pickwick to show them browsing through the books. And we were always very happy to have them come in. We made no demands on them. They could come in and take anything they want. We had excellent relationships with all the studios and with the people generally, the institutions around us.

One of the nice things I don't think I told you that happened was that one day I received a thank-you note from one of the [nuns]--I don't know if she was the mother superior--of Immaculate Heart College. And I opened it, and it was addressed to me personally. I had no idea they even knew my name. It went on and thanked me for all the nice things that I had done for the students, teachers, and nuns over the years. And it was signed, "I shall pray for you every day. Sister Mary Faith." I treasure that. I still have that. It came right out of the blue. I never

had personal contact with them.

The relationship was of this type: the high school department would give a play, and they wanted a little bit of an ad for it; we always managed to give them a little bit of an ad. They were giving a bazaar of some kind, would I give them a few books? We always gave them a few books. That didn't apply only to Immaculate Heart. It was our policy that local institutions, we were obligated to help support. And we always found a way to do it, in almost every case. I don't recollect turning down any school or library or group who asked us for something. We would always manage to give them either exactly what they wanted, if it was a specific thing, or something for a prize or whatnot. They had a library school at Immaculate Heart for nuns, Catholic school librarians. And they would have a sort of book exhibition. And they would ask me, would I loan them some books for their exhibition. I always told them, "Come and take what you want, unless it's for too long of a time. However, you're responsible for every book that's missing." They always agreed to that, and very often they would sell to the other librarians half of what they took; so in lieu of all the books, they'd bring me half the books and half money. But in the meantime, we were helping them, and we were establishing, I thought, a good relationship for the shop. And it was very, very helpful, because we had a wide-ranging trade. And this

happened to every kind of a school or library. Sometimes the city schools would want to have an exhibition of certain kinds of books for a special class or whatever--although we did not go in for book fairs and such because we felt for us it was too much trouble. But if they wanted some things for an exhibition, we always did that. The B'Nai B'Rith always had a Jewish Book Week, so we would supply them books for exhibition. This happened all the time with various kinds of schools and institutions. We had a policy, as far as people asking us for books as donations, that any organization that would send us their request on the letterhead of the organization would get a book. And many times they would ask for ads. Of course, with ads we had to be more careful, more circumspect, because the advertising value of most of those things was negligible. But if they wanted a five- or ten-dollar ad, why, we usually took it. I was often criticized by our bookkeeping department for it. I thought, well, somebody took the trouble to think of Pickwick, to sit down and write us a letter about it, and if it's going to cost us five dollars or something like that, why, to me it's worth it. And over the year, of course, it would come up to several hundred dollars, but I still think it's a good idea--for a shop like ours. A smaller shop, of course, couldn't afford it. But I felt I could afford it, and I felt that it was my duty. And I think that's another little bit that helped

make the name of Pickwick so important to everybody in the community. [tape stopped]

GARDNER: Bob Campbell mentioned that one of the real strengths of Pickwick, in Hollywood especially, was the remainder section, and that Stackhouse, to a large degree, was responsible for getting that going.

EPSTEIN: You're right. I think I mentioned that to you earlier. Bob is absolutely correct. We were faced with the choice of expanding our old-book department; we were faced with the necessity of making a choice. Remainder books were becoming a very important part of the retail book business. They always had been, but they were becoming more and more so. At one time, remainder books were sold only by department stores, special sales. Later on, some bookstores started to stock them, and we were one of them. And the remainder market broadened as the book business broadened. Where there were 10,000 titles twenty-five or thirty years ago, now there are 40,000 titles, which meant there were more titles remaindered. The remainder dealers were very sharp. They knew which ones to promote and which ones not to. And we were convinced that if we could buy them and display them, we could sell them. But they have to have absolute display. You couldn't have masses and masses of them on the shelf, because people wouldn't buy them. They would only buy them on tables--although you can sell almost anything from a

shelf sometimes. But to run the remainder department properly, you had to have large stacks, excellent books, displayed on tables where they were easy to see and easy to look at and easy to inspect. We went in for that, and Stackhouse became the specialist in it. He did an excellent job for many years with it. We had probably the largest batch of remainders of anybody--in the area, for certain--with the exception of some specialized remainder houses in New York. Some stores would buy remainders as a sale thing once or twice a year, but we kept them year-round. Of course, at Christmastime we used to always have beautiful remainders. At Christmastime the remainder houses would put on the market something they'd been holding back because they would get a better price at Christmastime. We used to have some beautiful remainders. To this day, I walk into the shop and somebody will take me aside, "Louis, they don't have as good remainders as you and Stack used to have." "Well," I said, "unfortunately, I agree with you." But the new policy being operated from Minneapolis, they can't control it as well as we could from the store. We found out it was difficult to control when you had even two stores, because there wasn't enough space in the shopping center store. We were fortunate to have our upstairs department and our mezzanine, which gave us all that additional space for display. But Bob Campbell's absolutely right. It became a good portion of our business, and a profitable

portion.

GARDNER: Did Stackhouse also travel to Europe and so on?

EPSTEIN: Yes. We started buying remainders from foreign houses. And then we said, well, if we're going to buy them, why don't we go there? So it was Stackhouse's job. We sent him to Europe; for a number of years, he went every year. He used to buy some beautiful stuff. But it's had its dangers, too: that you could overbuy. You had space only to display so many. And if you bought twice that many, they might have been excellent books, but unless you could display them, they weren't selling--we had to learn that the hard way. Very often we would sell remainders at less than cost, just because we needed the space, to get rid of them. But overall, I think we made money in remainders. And it created a whole new flow of traffic. The same people who would buy remainders would buy other books--which we found true, too, of the paperback books. People thought that the paperbacks would ruin the other business. Well, it did ruin the new-fiction market. It ruined it in the sense that it narrowed the number of titles of fiction that were being sold. As the paperback market widened and paperback publishers became more sophisticated in the way they distributed their books, it hurt the fiction market. The best sellers would sell and only a few others. The rest went right back to the publisher to be remainders. We very seldom bought fiction remainders. It's a very big

business now--the remainder business.

GARDNER: At the time, were you unique in having someone travel around the world, picking them up?

EPSTEIN: Yes.

GARDNER: No other bookstore did that?

EPSTEIN: I think we were unique. And later on, we would hear that somebody else was traveling. We did many things that were different, that we started a trend for. We were the first ones in our area, regular bookstore, that really started stocking paperbacks. I think we were the first account that Penguin books had, except for the college bookstores. We had a large stock of Penguins and Pelicans before the paperback market generally expanded. And we were one of the early ones to have regular paperbacks, also.

GARDNER: When would that have been?

EPSTEIN: Oh, this would go back fifteen, twenty years, before we really opened our regular paperback department. We opened a paperback department, one of the big ones here in the city--almost all the wall space in the new section, the section where the bar had been.

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